



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 30 JAN 2023

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/30 Bounty: destroy, capture West tank
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-business-offers-cash-bounties-destroy-western-tanks-ukraine-2023-01-30/
GIST	<p>Jan 30 (Reuters) - A Russian company said it will offer five million roubles (\$72,000) in cash to the first soldiers who destroy or capture western-made tanks in Ukraine, after the Kremlin vowed Russian forces would wipe out any Western tanks shipped to Ukraine.</p> <p>The United States, Germany and several other European countries are lining up to send Kyiv dozens of advanced combat tanks over the next few months to help boost Ukraine's military capacity as the war approaches the 12-month mark.</p> <p>The decision has been criticised by the Kremlin as a dangerous escalation, and spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the tanks would "burn" on the frontlines.</p> <p>Now a Russian company - Fores, a Urals-based firm which makes proppants for the energy industry - is offering cash payments to Russian servicemen who "capture or destroy" German-made Leopard 2 or U.S.-made Abrams tanks.</p> <p>The company said it will pay five million roubles to the first Russian soldier to destroy one of the tanks, and 500,000 roubles (\$7,200) for all subsequent attacks.</p> <p>Echoing language used by Russian officials and pro-war state TV hosts, Fores said NATO was pumping Ukraine with an "unlimited" amount of arms and escalating the conflict. It also said it would pay a 15-million rouble (\$215,000) bounty on Western-made fighter jets, should they ever be delivered to Ukraine.</p> <p>The tanks have not yet been dispatched to Kyiv, and it could take several months before the bulk of the promised deliveries are sent.</p> <p>Since the start of the conflict, Russia's defence ministry has claimed to have destroyed hundreds of pieces of Western weaponry.</p> <p>Kyiv has previously dismissed those statements, highlighting for instance that Russia has claimed to have destroyed more U.S.-made HIMARS rocket launcher pads than were ever delivered to the country.</p> <p>Previous deliveries of advanced Western arms, particularly HIMARS, have been credited with turning the tide of the 11-month war, helping Kyiv to secure a series of surprise victories and pushing back Russian forces from territory captured at the start of the invasion.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Israel: gunman injures 2; fatally shot
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/28/middleeast/jerusalem-shooting-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Two people were wounded in a shooting attack in Jerusalem on Saturday, emergency services say, the day after a gunman killed at least seven people near a synagogue in the city.</p> <p>The two men injured in the City of David area of Jerusalem on Saturday, one aged 22 and one in his 40s, are father and son, according to police. A 13-year-old who police say shot and wounded the pair was "neutralized and injured" by "two passers-by carrying licensed weapons."</p>

Tensions in Israel and the [Palestinian territories](#) remain high after Friday's shooting, which police chief Yaakov Shabtai described as "one of the worst terror attacks in the past few years." The shooter in that attack was also later killed by police forces, according to police.

"As a result of the shooting attack, the death of 7 civilians was determined and 3 others were injured with additional degrees of injury," police said.

Five of the shooting victims were pronounced dead at the scene, Israel's Magen David Adom (MDA) emergency rescue service said: four men and a woman. Five people were transported to hospitals, where another man and woman were declared dead. Among the wounded is a 15-year-old boy, the MDA said.

The attack occurred around 8:15 p.m. local time on Friday, near a synagogue on Neve Yaakov Street, according to a police statement.

Shabtai said the gunman "started shooting at anyone that was in his way. He got in his car and started a killing spree with a pistol at short range." He then fled the scene in a vehicle and was killed after a shootout with police forces, police said.

Police identified the gunman as a 21-year-old resident of East Jerusalem, saying in a statement that he appeared to have acted alone. East Jerusalem is a predominantly Palestinian area of the city, which was captured by Israel in 1967.

Referring to Saturday's attack, a community leader said the 13-year-old suspected shooter knew a 16-year-old Palestinian who died of gunshot wounds a day earlier. Jawad Siam, director of the Silwanic non-profit organization in East Jerusalem, told CNN the suspect's family denied their 13-year-old son was responsible for the Saturday attack, which happened close to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Silwan, East Jerusalem.

According to Siam, the 13-year-old suspect was a neighbor of a 16-year-old Palestinian who died of gunshot wounds in hospital overnight Friday. The 16-year-old was shot Wednesday by Israeli police.

Of the two wounded Saturday, the 22-year-old man is now in a serious but stable condition, anesthetized and ventilated in the intensive care unit, while his 47-year-old father is in a moderate and stable condition.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged people against revenge attacks on Friday night. "I call on the people not to take the law into their own hands. For that purpose we have an army, police and security forces. They act and will act according to the cabinet instructions," he said.

Meanwhile, the European Union on Saturday urged Israel to only use lethal force as a "last resort."

"The European Union fully recognises Israel's legitimate security concerns, as evidenced by the latest terrorist attacks, but it has to be stressed that lethal force must only be used as a last resort when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life," the EU's top diplomat Josep Borrell said Saturday in a press release.

Borrell also stressed that the bloc is "very concerned by the heightened tensions in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory."

"We call on both parties to do everything possible to de-escalate the situation and to restart security coordination, which is vital to prevent further acts of violence," he concluded.

Friday's incident came one day after [the deadliest day](#) for Palestinians in the West Bank in over a year, according to CNN records.

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/28/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-339-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new barrage of Russian shelling has killed at least 10 Ukrainian civilians and wounded 20 others in a day, the office of Ukraine's president has said. Regional officials said towns and villages in the east and in the south that are within reach of the Russian artillery suffered most. Six people died in the Donetsk region, two in Kherson and two in the Kharkiv region, the officials said. • A day earlier, Russian-fired missiles and self-propelled drones were reported to have hit deeper into Ukrainian territory, killing at least 11 people. • Ukrainian troops were locked in "fierce" fighting with Russian forces on Friday for control of the town of Vugledar, south-west of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. Both sides claimed success in the small administrative centre, a short distance from the strategic prize of the village of Pavlivka, Agence France-Presse reported. "Soon, Vugledar may become a new, very important success for us," Denis Pushilin, the Moscow-appointed leader of the Donetsk region, was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies. But Kyiv said the town remained contested. • Volodymyr Zelenskiy has described the situation on the frontline as "extremely acute", particularly in the eastern Donetsk region, where Russia is stepping up its offensive. The Ukrainian president reported major battles for Vuhledar and Bakhmut, to the north-east. Local Ukrainian officials reported heavy shelling in the north, north-east and east. • Ukraine's army claims to have killed 109 Russian soldiers and wounded another 188 in one day during fighting around Vuhledar. Serhii Cherevatyi, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian armed forces' eastern operational command, said the death toll was recorded on Thursday, adding: "Fierce fighting is ongoing. The enemy is indeed trying to achieve an intermediate success there, but thanks to the efforts of our defenders, they are unsuccessful." • Poland will send an additional 60 tanks to Ukraine on top of the 14 German-made Leopard 2 tanks it has already pledged, the Polish prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, has told CTV News. • A total of 321 heavy tanks have been promised to Ukraine by several countries, Ukraine's ambassador to France said on Friday. Vadym Omelchenko told French TV station BFM that "delivery terms vary for each case and we need this help as soon as possible", while not specifying the number of tanks per country. • Belgium announced an additional €93.6m (\$104.7m/£84.5m) package in military aid for Ukraine in what the Belgian prime minister, Alexander De Croo, said was – including previous spending – the largest of its kind Belgium had ever given another country. • Ukraine says it is setting up drone assault companies within its armed forces that will be equipped with Starlink satellite communications, as it presses ahead with an idea to build up an "army of drones", Reuters reported. Commander-in-chief Valeriy Zaluzhnyi signed off on the creation of the units in a project that would involve several ministries and agencies, the general staff said. • Ten regions of Ukraine are instituting emergency power outages due to a power shortage in the network after Thursday's Russian attacks, Ukraine's state broadcaster has reported. Repairs to damaged facilities are continuing. • The Kremlin claims Joe Biden has the key to end the conflict in Ukraine by directing Kyiv to settle but has not been willing to use it. "The key to the Kyiv regime is largely in the hands of Washington," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on Friday. "Now we see that the current White House leader ... does not want to use this key. On the contrary, he chooses the path of further pumping weapons into Ukraine." Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused Washington of engaging in a "hybrid war" against Moscow. • The European Union wants swift accountability for "horrific" crimes in Ukraine, EU justice ministers have said while meeting in Stockholm. But the member states differ over how to bring prosecutions, seek evidence or fund war damage repairs. . • Hungary will veto any European Union sanctions against Russia affecting nuclear energy, the prime minister, Viktor Orbán, told state radio on Friday. • Russia is violating the "fundamental principles of child protection" in wartime by giving Ukrainian children Russian passports and putting them up for adoption, the head of the UN's refugee agency, Filippo Grandi, has said.
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HEADLINE	01/29 International push to contain Tehran
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-strikes-iran-amid-new-international-push-to-contain-tehran-11675004979
GIST	<p>Israel carried out a drone strike targeting a defense compound in Iran, as the U.S. and Israel look for new ways to contain Tehran's nuclear and military ambitions, according to U.S. officials and people familiar with the operation.</p> <p>Iranian officials said that the country's air defenses had fended off an attempted attack by three small quadcopters targeting a munitions factory in the city of Isfahan, right next to a site belonging to the Iran Space Research Center, which has been sanctioned by the U.S. for its work on Iran's ballistic-missile program.</p> <p>Iran said its air defenses brought down one of the drones while the two others exploded above the warehouse, causing minor damage to the roof.</p> <p>Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian called the blast a cowardly strike.</p> <p>"Such actions cannot impact the determination and intent of our experts for peaceful nuclear progress," he said, according to government news service PadDolat.</p> <p>The Israeli military declined to comment.</p> <p>The strike marks the first known attack carried out by Israel under the new far-right coalition government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who sanctioned a series of bold operations inside Iran when he last served in that role from 2009 to 2021.</p> <p>Israel's latest strike comes as Israeli and American officials are discussing new ways to combat Iran's destabilizing operations, including its deepening military cooperation with Russia.</p> <p>Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns made an unannounced trip to Israel last week to discuss Iran and other regional issues, according to people familiar with his visit. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is scheduled to arrive in Israel on Monday to continue the U.S.-Israel talks about Iran and other regional issues.</p> <p>Last week, the U.S. and Israel carried out their largest-ever joint military exercise involving more than 7,500 personnel from both countries and a series of scenarios to test their ability to take out air-defense systems and refuel jet planes—both of which could be key elements of a major military strike on Iran.</p> <p>Israel's top general told The Wall Street Journal last week that Israel and the U.S. were preparing for the worst.</p> <p>Gen. Herzl Halevi, the Israel Defense Forces' chief of staff, said that the military exercises sent "a very clear message to Iran: If Iran makes mistakes, offense capabilities are getting ready."</p> <p>Efforts by President Biden to resurrect a nuclear containment deal with Iran have come to a standstill, but the U.S. has yet to develop an alternative. Mr. Netanyahu has been pushing the U.S. to take a tougher stance against Iran.</p> <p>At the same time, the U.S. has been pressing Israel to do more to help Ukraine in its war with Russia, especially now that Tehran is providing Moscow with hundreds of drones used to attack Ukraine. Israel has rebuffed pressure to send Ukraine direct military aid, which Russian politicians have warned would imperil Israeli relations with Moscow.</p> <p>Russia and Israel have had a yearslong understanding that has allowed Israeli warplanes to repeatedly strike Iranian targets inside Syria, where Moscow provides air defenses for President Bashar al-Assad. Israel is worried that open support for Ukraine could imperil its ability to strike Iranian targets in Syria.</p>

Mr. Netanyahu's new government isn't expected to offer Ukraine direct military support. But it is expected to continue carrying out covert strikes against Iran's nuclear and military program.

Strikes like the one over the weekend help damage Iran's ability to help Russia with [the war in Ukraine](#).

"This is a smart trifecta where Israel can hurt Iran, help Ukraine, and not risk its strategic interests in Syria or run the risk of the diversion of its sensitive military technology to Russia and into Iran," said Mark Dubowitz, chief executive officer of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a Washington-based think tank critical of Iran.

"Explosive night in Iran," Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukraine's president, wrote on Twitter in response to the blast in Iran. "[Ukraine] did warn you."

When Mr. Netanyahu was last in office, he oversaw a series of Israeli strikes on Iran involving small drones like those used over the weekend, according to former Israeli and U.S. officials. His successor, Naftali Bennett, embraced a strategy he called the "Octopus Doctrine," under which Israel carried out strikes not just against Tehran's proxies in the Middle East, like Hezbollah, but also against Iran itself as the head of the so-called octopus.

In 2021, Iran's Atomic Energy Organization said it had thwarted an attack by two quadcopter drones on one of its facilities. Last May, quadcopters were used to target a military site used to develop drone, missile and nuclear technology outside Tehran.

The main target of Saturday's strike was a warehouse located behind a mall in Isfahan that Iran said was an ammunition storehouse. Video of the explosion posted on social media by witnesses captured a small explosion above a building that appeared to cause minimal damage.

Satellite imagery released on Sunday appeared to show minor damage to the building.

Ronen Solomon, an independent intelligence analyst and author of the Intelli Times blog, said that the small size of the blast indicated that the target wasn't an ammunition storehouse. Instead, he said, it could have been a lab or military-logistics site.

Public figures in Iran suggested Israel and its Western allies were behind the attack.

"They both need to learn that punishment comes with failure too," said Mohammad Marandi, who is close to the government and was previously a spokesman for Iran's nuclear-negotiations team.

Mr. Solomon said satellite imagery showed the warehouse is located across the street from a site belonging to a unit of the Iran Space Research Center—a U.S.-sanctioned organization that has worked with the Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group, which is responsible for Iran's ballistic missile programs, and the Iranian Ministry of Defense.

The Wall Street Journal was able to confirm Mr. Solomon's information. Social-media channels close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps separately showed a satellite image of the targeted site, which matches the exact area where the Isfahan unit of the Space Research Center is located.

A missile plant owned by the Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group on a site west of Tehran was reportedly targeted by an Israeli strike in September 2021.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Winter weather alert: Texas to Illinois
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/30/weather/winter-weather-storm-central-us/index.html

More than 25 million people were under winter weather alerts Monday as a potentially significant winter weather event set up across a large swath of the Central US, bringing the risk of heavy precipitation and significant icing from Texas to Illinois.

“The interaction of an arctic air mass and moisture will set the stage for an expansive area of dangerous travel conditions early in the week,” the National Weather Service warned.

A zone of sleet, freezing rain and drizzle is “very likely” from parts of Texas to the Ohio and Tennessee Valleys, according to the weather service.

While the winter storm won’t produce precipitation the entire time, it will likely be a prolonged event and cities that see freezing – or slightly below freezing – temperatures are expected to be hit the hardest.

Dangerously bitter cold air has also settled in behind the arctic front as it slowly moved through the west over the weekend, with more than 15 million people under wind chill warnings Monday morning.

Wind chills as low as 45 degrees below zero are possible. The coldest wind chills can cause frostbite in a little as 10 minutes.

In Austin, Texas, freezing rain could begin as early as Monday morning. Icing will be possible mainly late at night through the mid-morning hours when temperatures will be coldest. Dallas is also expected to see significant icing from one tenth to a quarter of an inch.

Snowfall up to an inch and ice around two tenths of an inch are possible in Oklahoma City. Meanwhile, snow and sleet up to an inch and ice up to a tenth of an inch are possible in Springfield, Missouri, and ice accumulation up to a tenth of an inch in St. Louis.

“The snow will result in reduced visibility and the snow/ice will produce hazardous driving conditions,” the weather service warned.

Storms make for hazardous conditions on the road

The most significant travel impacts in the Texas area are expected Tuesday, with icy bridges and slick roadways possible, according to the weather service’s Fort Worth office. Drivers in the area were asked to watch out for patches of black ice and slippery roadways.

“Avoid travel if you can, but if you have to get out, watch out for ice/black ice, make sure to give yourself plenty of time and to slow down while driving,” the weather service said.

In Oklahoma, deteriorating travel conditions were expected to begin Monday morning as sleet and freezing rain moved into the area, according to the weather service office in Norman.

And as freezing drizzle spread into central Illinois Sunday evening, the weather service office in Lincoln warned that slick roadways, sidewalks and parking lots are possible. “Use caution if heading out tonight,” forecasters said.

Poor weather may have been a factor in a deadly multi-vehicle crash in Carbon County, Wyoming, over the weekend.

The crash on Interstate 80 left one person dead and injured several others Saturday evening as an arctic front was slowly moving through the area.

While the exact cause of the collision it is not known, excessive blowing snow and winds kept visibility down when it happened – even at times when no new snow was falling. Areas along the I-80 saw between 1 and 5 inches of snow, with isolated areas along the highway seeing even higher accumulations.

A total of 44 vehicles collided between two separate crashes on the interstate, the post stated.

	<p>Cities across the region could expect more snow Monday.</p> <p>Lake-effect snow is expected to sweep down from the Great Lakes and upslope over parts of the Central Appalachians.</p> <p>A cold high pressure over the Northern Plains will move south into the Ohio Valley by Monday, bringing temperatures 15 to 35 degrees below average over parts of the Northern Rockies and Great Basin to the Plains and Upper Mississippi Valley, according to the weather service.</p> <p>Meanwhile, showers are forecast for parts of the Lower Mississippi, Tennessee and Ohio valleys, as well as parts of the Northeast, the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast into Monday.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 REASON to improve intelligence analysis
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/intelligence/using-reason-to-improve-intelligence-analysis/
GIST	<p>Every day, the Intelligence Community (IC) labors to provide policymakers with insightful analysis to answer and inform on some of the toughest national security questions and issues. More often than not, the IC is able to provide ground-truth on seemingly murky problems that may otherwise not be discovered or explained.</p> <p>However, even with the IC's vast resources and expertise, analysts may still not have the full range of available information to counter arguments and draw the most robust conclusions. This can potentially have devastating consequences if policymakers make the wrong decision based on the intelligence they are provided.</p> <p>For example, the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction noted in their Unclassified "Report to the President of the United States" dated March 31, 2005, that, "virtually all of the Intelligence Community's information on Iraq's alleged mobile biological weapons facilities was supplied by a source, codenamed 'Curveball,' who was a fabricator." Contrary evidence was discounted or ignored, and evidence of Curveball's fabrications was not passed on to policymakers.</p> <p>Avoiding similar outcomes of unintentionally providing erroneous information is a constant challenge for the IC. To address this challenge, IARPA has developed the Rapid Explanation, Analysis and Sourcing Online (REASON) program. REASON's objective is to develop novel technologies to help intelligence analysts substantially improve evidence and reasoning in draft analytic reports.</p> <p>REASON will assist and enhance analysts' work by pointing them to previously unconsidered key pieces of evidence and by helping them determine which alternative explanations have the strongest support. To achieve this, REASON will exploit recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) so evidence is provided automatically and on demand as the analyst works on a report. REASON won't perform the analysis or write the report for the analyst, but it will seek to strengthen the report's conclusions.</p> <p>"IC analysts have a really difficult job, which requires them to sort through huge amounts of often uncertain and conflicting information as they strive to answer intelligence questions," said REASON Program Manager, Dr. Steven Rieber. "I believe REASON will help make an analyst's job easier and increase the value of the available information."</p> <p>Dr. Rieber cited the lead-up to Russia invading Ukraine as an example of the impact of high-quality intelligence. "Policymakers said IC analysts did an amazing job updating them with fast-breaking information about Russia's intentions and movements," Dr. Rieber said.</p> <p>When launched, IARPA will invest nearly four years into developing REASON's underlying AI technology. To do this, IARPA will select performer teams to conduct research and development to build</p>

	<p>AI systems and then an independent testing and evaluation (T&E) team will evaluate the systems. T&E will ensure that REASON AI technology is effective in helping analysts discover valuable evidence, identify strengths and weaknesses in reasoning, and produce higher-quality reports.</p> <p>While REASON is just getting started and there's no guarantee of success, Dr. Rieber said he is optimistic. "I think AI is far enough advanced that REASON stands a very good chance of becoming a reality."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Auckland New Zealand flood death toll rises
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/29/auckland-flooding-death-toll-rises-as-new-zealand-hit-with-more-heavy-rain-and-landslides
GIST	<p>Heavy rainfall continued to batter New Zealand's north island, causing landslides, flash floods and knocking out roads, with the death toll rising to four after a person who had been missing was confirmed dead.</p> <p>Battered by rain since Friday, Auckland, New Zealand's largest city of 1.6 million people, remained under a state of emergency on Sunday. The nation's weather forecaster, MetService, warned of more severe weather on Sunday and Monday for the north island. Intense rainfall could also cause surface and flash flooding, it said.</p> <p>The focus of the emergency has since moved south, with Waitomo District – located about 220 kms (137 miles) from Auckland – declaring a state of emergency late on Saturday.</p> <p>Police confirmed that a man missing after being swept away on Friday in Onewhero, a rural village about 70 kms (43 miles) south of Auckland, had died.</p> <p>"The most horrific part of it is that we've lost lives," deputy prime minister Carmel Sepuloni told reporters in Auckland.</p> <p>Climate change is causing episodes of heavy rainfall to become more common and more intense in New Zealand, though the impact varies by region. Climate change minister James Shaw noted the link to climate change on Saturday when he tweeted his support for those affected by flooding.</p> <p>On Sunday, police said they were assisting with traffic management and road closures in that region after heavy rainfall "caused numerous slips, flooding and damage to roads".</p> <p>In nearby Bay of Plenty there was also "widespread flooding", police said, as well as a landslide that had knocked down a house and was threatening neighbouring properties.</p> <p>Thousands of properties remained without power, while hundreds were without water, authorities said on Sunday.</p> <p>But Air New Zealand said the airline's international flights in and out of Auckland would resume from noon on Sunday (2300 GMT on Saturday).</p> <p>On Saturday, prime minister Chris Hipkins, less than a week in office, flew by helicopter over Auckland before touring flood-hit homes. He described the flood impact in the city as "unprecedented" in recent memory.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Chinese count cost opening amid Covid
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/29/chinese-cost-covid-xi-lockdowns-china
GIST	When Sunny* thinks back to March last year, she laughs ruefully at the ordeal. The 19-year-old Shanghai student spent that month locked in her dormitory, unable to shop for essentials or wash

clothes, even banned from showering for two weeks over Covid fears. In April, the entire city locked down.

It was the beginning of the chaos of 2022, as local Chinese authorities desperately tried to follow President Xi Jinping's zero-Covid decree while facing the most transmissible strain of the virus yet: Omicron. "Everyone was panicking, no one was ready," she tells the *Observer*.

By the end of the year, zero-Covid was gone. Sunny says she felt instantly "relieved" that lockdowns were over but her feelings soon turned to anger as it became clear China's government had opened up the country, knowing it wasn't ready. "I felt it was all for nothing," Sunny says.

Over the last two months, the virus has rapidly spread through the country. Up to 10,000 critical cases were registered in hospitals every day. Morgues were overwhelmed, pharmacies reported shortages of basic medications, and supply of antiviral drugs was held up by protracted negotiations with foreign suppliers. Online and in the streets, people spoke of almost everyone they knew having caught Covid, and of elderly relatives dying.

Sunny's grandfather was among those who died in that wave. "It was the morning, and my mum walked into my room and said: your grandpa is in the emergency room," she recalls. "A few hours later, he passed away. My grandmother was in tears, saying he had left her behind."

Xi's extraordinary backflip left analysts alarmed and confused. China was not the only country to choose a zero-Covid strategy, and certainly not the only one to "let it rip" once it dropped it. But it was the last, and global health experts say there were plenty of lessons it could have heeded – primarily, making sure vaccinations and health resources were high before the tsunami of cases hit.

"All governments had to decide to open up at some stage or risk the consequences of lockdowns far outweighing the problems of Covid," says Professor Emma McBryde, an epidemiologist at James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia.

"Most models suggest that it would be better for the health system to open up slowly. Although there would be little change in how many people get infected, it could mean some lives are saved if the health system can function well."

But Xi threw the gates open. Right up until the day of repeal, local governments were still developing and enforcing zero-Covid measures and infrastructure. The city of Chongqing was building a 21,000-bed quarantine centre.

Experts on health and Chinese politics have told the *Observer* they believe the local authorities were hamstrung. Any preparations for ending zero-Covid would be seen as a vote of no confidence in both the policy and Xi – an act of political suicide.

So when cases spread, there weren't enough doctors, nurses, intensive care beds, fever medication or antiviral drugs, and vaccination rates and options were inadequate. According to Chinese government data, the first 55,000 deaths recorded in this wave were at an average age of about 80. In China, the vulnerable elderly are also the most likely to be unvaccinated.

"My sense is there is no strategy in this critical area," says Professor William Hurst, deputy director at the Centre for Geopolitics at the University of Cambridge, about China's vaccines. "I'm surprised by how quickly they are moving, but more so by the apparent lack of attention to basic measures with vaccines."

Chinese writer Murong Xuecun, who interviewed Wuhan residents in the first lockdown in 2020, says China's abrupt U-turn "was a rash, one-man decision" made without consultation. "Within 24 hours we saw a total turnaround – we had no idea what happened in those 24 hours, what changed Xi Jinping's mind, why there was a 180-degree change from one extreme to another."

There is a lot of debate about the impact of the November protests against zero-Covid on his decision. Some experts say there were probably so many cases already – the numbers hidden – that Xi just realised the policy had to end. Other theories feature financial considerations, because China's economy has been battered by zero-Covid.

Chen Daoyin, a former associate political science professor at Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, said Xi probably acted when he felt the economic situation was no longer sustainable. "When the leader is acting on a whim, there is no predictability and no certainty."

One oft-shared suspicion is that Xi wanted to speed up economic recovery by quickly building herd immunity with one massive wave. This theory was bolstered by Chinese health authorities claiming last week that 80% of the population had been infected, and so the possibility of a second wave was "very small". Some health experts have cautioned against this assumption.

"Herd immunity seemed to be occurring for the original strain and for Delta, but seems to be much less applicable to the Omicron strain," says McBryde.

Other countries, including the UK, have previously hung hopes on herd immunity, and Professor Chi Chun-huei, director of the centre for global health at Oregon State University, says there's nothing inherently wrong with aiming for herd immunity if you do it right. "Ideally, if you are going to take this 180-degree, you have to be prepared ... and the goal should be minimising deaths and severe symptoms.

"This was a common problem of countries that practised zero-Covid - they were overconfident ... and underprepared." In one example, Taiwan took note of Hong Kong's hospital system collapse and [was better prepared than it might have been](#) when Omicron arrived.

Estimates of Covid fatalities in China range from the official count of about 75,000 to more than a million. The picture is clouded by a lack of transparency, rigid definitions in attributing a Covid-related death, and data collection failures.

Often when there are mass deaths, families struggle with their relative being reduced to a statistic. In China, few were even given that courtesy.

Among dozens of Chinese people who contacted the *Guardian* and *Observer* about their experience, Ms Chen, a young Shanghai resident, tells of the friend who died of Covid, a teacher in his 30s who she describes as a "treasure of a human".

Melody, a Chinese woman living abroad, wrote of her "selfless and generous" uncle. After recovering from a stroke last year, he died at home of what she believes was Covid. "I'm astonished that the three years of Covid haven't been used for a humane exit strategy. It shows me: protecting lives was never the motor behind zero-Covid. Power was. Now the Chinese people also see it."

Across China, hundreds of thousands of families are in mourning. Many are now questioning their faith in the government. The episode has seemingly not affected Xi's power but it has dented his reputation. A 32-year-old man in Guangzhou says he was once a patriot but is now disillusioned. "Maybe I should thank Covid for making me clearly see through the whole political and economic system."

Sunny was already sceptical but says even her grandmother, who always believed the government worked for the people, is now complaining about it. "It's kind of in our culture that we just endure the hardships that come at us," she says.

"But we realise how much our lives can change on the whim of policymakers, and we are angry. This fight was about politics and power, but it was always the Chinese people who would pay."

	* Some names of people in China have been changed on request for anonymity
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HEADLINE	01/29 Memphis beating: systemic racism?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/29/memphis-officers-nichols/
GIST	<p>MEMPHIS — For the mother of Tyre Nichols, the fact that five Memphis police officers charged with beating her son are also Black has compounded her sorrow as she tries to cope with his violent death at age 29.</p> <p>“It makes it even harder to swallow,” RowVaughn Wells said in an interview last week, “because they are Black and they know what we have to go through.”</p> <p>The race of the five officers charged in the Nichols killing has prompted a complex grappling among Black activists and advocates for police reform about the pervasiveness of institutional racism in policing. Nichols died three days after he was pulled out of his car Jan. 7, kicked, punched and struck with a baton on a quiet neighborhood street by Black officers, whose aggressive assault was captured on body-camera videos released Friday.</p> <p>The widely viewed videos of the Nichols beating provided fodder for right-wing media ecosystems that routinely blame Black America’s maladies on Black America, and spawned nuanced conversations among Black activists about how systemic racism can manifest in the actions of non-White people.</p> <p>The Memphis Police Department, which has nearly 2,000 officers, is 58 percent Black, the result of a decades-long effort to field a police force that resembles the city’s 64 percent Black population. Unlike in several recent high-profile police brutality cases, Memphis Police Chief Cerelyn Davis, who is Black, and other officials acted swiftly in firing, arresting and charging the Memphis officers in advance of the release of video footage.</p> <p>Though some studies have shown that police officers of color use force less frequently against Black civilians than their White counterparts, analysts say the improvement is marginal.</p> <p>“Diversifying law enforcement is certainly not going to solve this problem,” said Samuel Sinyangwe, president of Mapping Police Violence.</p> <p>He pointed to many factors in the policing system that lead to a disproportionate response against people of color: directives to work in neighborhoods where more people of color live and a system that relies on the discretion of the officer to enforce things like traffic stops, opening the door for internal biases to play a role.</p> <p>Conversations on Fox News over the weekend were less academic.</p> <p>“Tucker Carlson Tonight” guest Jason Whitlock, a conservative sports culture blogger who is Black, blamed “young Black men and their inability to treat each other in a humane way,” as muted footage of the Memphis officers beating Nichols played side-by-side.</p> <p>“It looked like gang violence to me. It looked like what young Black men do when they’re supervised by a single, Black woman,” Whitlock said, referring to Davis, the Memphis police chief, who is married.</p> <p>Focus on the individual officers in the aftermath of police killing and not the institution the officer belongs to perpetuates the belief that policing’s problems are the result of a few bad apples — a narrative embraced by police, said Jeanelle Austin, who runs the George Floyd Global Memorial in Minnesota.</p> <p>“This is what I fear: What’s going to happen in Memphis is what happened to Minneapolis — is that when Derek Chauvin and the other [three] officers were charged, the narrative turned from an issue of the police department to an individual issue,” Austin said. “That was a PR strategy.”</p>

“What we’ve been screaming from our lungs for years is that the system and the culture of policing trains people’s minds regardless of the color of their skin to behave a certain way,” she said.

Systemic racism can be more difficult for the general public to grasp than explicitly visible White-on-Black crimes, said Craig Futterman, a clinical professor of law at the University of Chicago Law School who studies policing and civil rights.

“We’d like to think in the binary — the good guys and the bad guys,” he said. “It’s far easier to consume the story in an uncomplicated way seeing a White officer shoot 14 shots at a young Black boy laying on the ground,” he added, referencing the 2014 murder of Laquan McDonald.

From the protests in Ferguson, Mo., in 2014 through those in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, activists have long sought to reform policing. But the lack of centralization between local, state and federal police entities, along with failures in congressional action, has not resulted in widespread changes.

More than two weeks after Nichols was killed after being pulled over for what police said was reckless driving, Ayanna Robinson drove 6 1/2 hours from Indianapolis to Memphis to join demonstrations she thought would include thousands of protesters angered by his recorded beating by officers. She arrived to find dozens, not thousands, of protesters and they seemed calm.

Robinson, 28, a manager at a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant, said the turnout was nothing like what she saw in Memphis after Floyd, a Black man, was murdered in Minneapolis police custody in May 2020. In a way, the city seemed too peaceful after the Nichols killing, she said.

“In order to get a reaction, there has to be a reaction, and right now there’s no type of action,” she said, looking around a park where 100 protesters gathered Friday evening.

Robinson said one of the major reasons she thought many people seemed more subdued in response to the Nichols death was that the five officers charged in beating him are Black. If the officers had been White, “All hell would have broken loose. The city would have been in war.”

Nikki Owens felt a similar frustration in the aftermath of the death of her cousin, William Green, who was shot to death while handcuffed by a Black officer in Prince George’s County, Md., in January 2020.

“In America we’re taught that racism is black and white,” said Owens, who now works with the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability. “And we are not taught about institutional or systemic racism, even though we see it everywhere. We are taught that if a Black person kills another Black person, it can’t be racist. It’s ‘Black-on-Black crime.’”

Owens said that attitude contributed to her struggles to inspire activism among area residents and in getting national and local media coverage of her cousin’s killing.

“There wasn’t the outrage,” she said. “Even when George Floyd passed away, nobody reached out to us.”

Owens said she felt as if the world viewed her cousin’s death as somehow different than other police killings. The officer’s criminal trial begins this year.

“When I was out in the community and I would talk to people, I could see their reaction when I told them the officer was Black,” she said. “And some people would ask what color the officer was, which is another indication of that lack of understanding.”

Some protesters said that while the racism isn’t explicit, Nichols’s death could be a moment for the nation to understand the way pervasive, institutional racism functions, and how it can compromise individuals.

	<p>Bakari Sellers, a former South Carolina state legislator, civil rights attorney and CNN contributor, said the Nichols beating made him recall the Black Minneapolis police officer, J. Alexander Kueng, who knelt on Floyd's back as Derek Chauvin suffocated him.</p> <p>"He talked about how he thought he could make a difference in policing," Sellers said of Kueng. "And then like three days after his hiring, he's there watching George Floyd being brutalized and doing nothing about it.</p> <p>"For many Black folks, the race of a cop is cop."</p> <p>Jason Sole, a community organizer in Minneapolis and former head of the local NAACP, said he's never felt a sense of relief when encountering Black officers.</p> <p>"I never had that feeling of 'Oh great, it's a Black cop, yay.' No. I was born in '78 and I never had that feeling, not once," Sole said. "All your skinfolk ain't kinfolk."</p> <p>Regardless of color, Sole said, "we need people who are loving, people who are showing we care, people who understand that grace has to be shown to everybody."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Neo-Nazi homeschool network
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/z34ane/neo-nazi-homeschool-ohio
GIST	<p>Earlier this month, while the rest of the country was celebrating the achievements of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., parents and children in the "Dissident Homeschool" network opened a lesson plan and were greeted with the words: "As Adolf Hitler wrote..."</p> <p>The contents of the MLK lesson plan would be shocking for almost anyone, but for members of the 2,400-member "Dissident Homeschool" Telegram channel, this was a regular Monday at school.</p> <p>"It is up to us to ensure our children know him for the deceitful, dishonest, riot-inciting negro he actually was," the administrator of the network's Telegram channel wrote, alongside a downloadable lesson plan for elementary school children. "He is the face of a movement which ethnically cleansed whites out of urban areas and precipitated the anti-white regime that we are now fighting to free ourselves from."</p> <p>Since the group began in October 2021 it has openly embraced Nazi ideology and promoted white supremacy, while proudly discouraging parents from letting their white children play with or have any contact with people of any other race. Admins and members use racist, homophobic, and antisemitic slurs without shame, and quote Hitler and other Nazi leaders daily in a channel open to the public.</p> <p>VICE News joined the group simply by clicking on a link, though the list of members was not publicly visible.</p> <p>What's even more disturbing, however, is that the couple who run the channel are not only teaching parents how to indoctrinate their children into this fascist ideology, they're also encouraging them to meet up in real life and join even more radical groups, which could further reinforce their beliefs and potentially push them toward violent action.</p> <p>'Mr. and Mrs. Saxon'</p> <p>The "Dissident Homeschool" network is run by a husband and wife team who use the aliases "Mr. and Mrs. Saxon." This week the antifascist research group Anonymous Comrades Collective published a detailed report that unmasked the Saxons as Logan and Katja Lawrence, who live in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, with their four young children.</p>

The researchers were able to identify the Lawrences through biographical details they shared in the Telegram channel's group chat and on podcast appearances. One of the key clues to identifying them came when they revealed that they owned a German Shepherd called Blondi—the same name as Hitler's dog.

The researchers found photos that Katja posted on Facebook with her German Shepherd, and were also able to confirm Katja Lawrence's ownership of this dog through the Wyandot County dog licensing website dog search feature.

The Lawrences did not respond to multiple emails, text messages, social media messages, and phone calls from VICE News to discuss the contents of the report and their neo-Nazi homeschooling group.

Katja Lawrence, who is in her mid-30s, launched the channel in October 2021, because she “was having a rough time finding Nazi-approved school material for [her] homeschool children,” as she told the neo-Nazi podcast “Achtung! Amerikaner” last year.

“We are so deeply invested into making sure that that child becomes a wonderful Nazi.”

Later in the same podcast episode, Lawrence expanded on her view on why she wanted to educate her children at home. “We have our children's best interest at heart and nobody can do a better job than we can because it's our child. We are so deeply invested into making sure that that child becomes a wonderful Nazi,” she said.

When VICE News asked for comment on the Lawrences and their channel, the host of the podcast, Gordon Kahl, replied: “I think you should kill yourself instead.”

Katja Lawrence, born Katja van den Berg, is originally from the Netherlands and moved to the U.S. after meeting her husband at the Oktoberfest festival in Berlin, according to an old LiveJournal blog uncovered by the researchers. She became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 2017.

Logan Lawrence works as an agent for a local, family-run insurance agency. When reached by phone, an employee at the company told VICE News that they would not be commenting on the story.

Logan is also a member of a local Masonic lodge and features in a number of pictures on its website, where he is listed as an officer of the lodge. The secretary of the lodge did not respond to VICE News' request for comment.

Both Katja and Lawrence have a limited presence on mainstream social media platforms, and the one Facebook account that was operated by Katja was deleted this week after the Anonymous Comrades Collective report was published.

Katja Lawrence is the main poster on the “Dissident Homeschool” channel, posting classroom schedules, book lists, lesson plans, and other educational resources for like-minded parents.

Racist lesson plans

Lawrence uses every lesson plan as an opportunity to push racist ideology. In one “math assignment,” children were asked to interpret “crime statistics,” the goal of which was to “realize the demographics to be cautious around.” Another lesson called “IQ Unit Study” discusses IQ scores. “The blacks—on average—have a much lower IQ than whites,” Lawrence wrote.

Last week the group chat channel belonging to the “Dissident Homeschool” network was shut down, but VICE News has reviewed an archive of the chats dating back to October 2021, showing that initially the channel was populated by a small number of core members who contributed most of the comments and content.

However, by the time the chat archive ended on Jan. 4, there were hundreds more people contributing to the conversations, and discussions had expanded from children's education to the dangers of diversity and how "Indiana Jones" movies are nothing more than "Jewish revenge porn."

One parent posting in the group last year thanked the Lawrences for their work and explained why they agreed that public school education was not for them.

"I don't even want my kids exposed to the gay loving, anti-family, Jew factory that is public school, I can't stand it."

"This is why I want to make the switch. I don't even want my kids exposed to the gay loving, anti-family, Jew factory that is public school, I can't stand it."

Other parents offered their own educational resources, with one member writing: "Here is an overview of 10 Reason why Hitler was one of the Good Guys:"

When one parent named Nancy recommended three preachers that the group might find interesting, another member responded: "A ni**er, a race mixer, and a guy who literally says that Israel should rule the world. You're 0 for 3."

Katja Lawrence then added: "Nancy, did you know you are in a chat of dissidents who fully support white nationalism? We do not support Israel and do not listen to black preachers."

The members of the channel have also expanded beyond the U.S. to include members from other countries, though only those from European countries with acceptable ethnicity, such as Norway, Germany, and the U.K., are welcomed.

At one point in the chat, Katja Lawrence told a UK-based member of the group that she would help put him in touch with the head of one of the biggest white nationalist groups in the U.K., suggesting the Lawrences have made connections with antisemites and white supremacists outside of their own homeschooling community.

Baking a 'Führer cake'

When the Telegram channel reached its 1,000th subscriber, just months after it launched, Katja Lawrence posted a picture of German schoolchildren performing a Nazi salute in a classroom, writing: "It fills my heart with joy to know there is such a strong base of homeschoolers and homeschool-interested national socialists. Hail Victory."

The Lawrences also described how their family celebrated Hitler's birthday by baking a "Führer cake."

"We had a lovely dinner followed by Führerkuchen," Katja Lawrence wrote. "Our children celebrated Adolf's birthday today by learning about Germany and eating favorite German foods." She later added that she had baked "quite a few swastika items, my latest a swastika apple pie."

In one chilling, now-deleted post on Telegram, Katla Lawrence posted an audio message of her children shouting "sieg heil."

While Katja and Logan Lawrence claim in Telegram comments that they warn their children not to discuss their Nazi views with those outside the family, they also don't limit their activities to the online world and help others to connect with fellow white nationalists in the real world.

Secret 'pool parties'

"There is a huge network of people like us," Katja wrote on the Telegram channel. "If you are asking what you can do: get vetted and join a local pool party. I would say that's the best decision Mr. Saxon and I made last year. We joined a pool party and our children now play with other white children where they can speak and play freely. "

A “pool party” is the name for a secretive meetup organized by white supremacist group [The Right Stuff and its political wing the National Justice Party](#). Katja Lawrence even goes so far as to share the direct email for a contact at The Right Stuff who deals with vetting, while an account named the “National Justice Party” posts updates that include calls for “Dissident Homeschool” members to join its supporter group and updates on its Christmas charity drive.

“Our children now play with other white children where they can speak and play freely.”

“It has been huge for us to get into that real life network. Contribute by joining. It makes all the difference,” Katja Lawrence wrote.

It is hard to gauge the influence of the “Dissident Homeschool Network,” but in leaked emails from people attempting to join the [white nationalist group Patriot Front](#), applicants list the “Dissident Homeschool” as being [“Influential figures, media outlets or platforms.”](#)

The Right Stuff and the National Justice League were described by the Anti-Defamation League as “virulently antisemitic”, while 31 members of Patriot Front were arrested last year inside a U-haul truck on their way to an LGBTQ Pride event in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, carrying shields and smoke grenades.

Yet Katja attempts to describe these group’s activities as entirely wholesome.

“To dispel some misconceptions: these groups do not encourage or solicit people to commit illegal activities,” Katja wrote. “It is a nice group of wholesome white people getting together for cookouts and such.”

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HEADLINE	01/29 KCRHA: \$25B over 5yrs end homelessness
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/homeless/billions-proposed-end-homelessness-king-county/281-414c50c6-2f8b-4af2-80aa-efcf952f2718
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash — The King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) released a draft plan that calls for \$25.5 billion over five years to end homeless in King County.</p> <p>They are asking for feedback on the draft, which the public can provide by going to this link. Initially, \$8 billion would be used for capital costs and \$3.5 billion would be necessary each year for operational costs.</p> <p>Poll after poll shows that homelessness is a top issue in the state of Washington. Gov. Jay Inslee is devoting \$4 billion of his proposed 2023-2025 budget to affordable housing.</p> <p>"Fundamentally, this (homelessness issue) has occurred because we have not built the housing, the roofs people need to live under," Governor Inslee said at a press conference.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell plans to spend \$250 million each year for his 2023-2024 budget on affordable housing.</p> <p>“Lack of access to housing is the source to homelessness and gaining access to housing is the solution,” Mayor Harrell said at a recent press conference.</p> <p>KCRHA’s plan lays out how it arrived at a price point much larger than what the governor or mayor has proposed. Most notably, their plans fund a little more than 23,000 temporary housing units.</p> <p>However, one King County Elected Official was quick to push back.</p> <p>“It’s too much, it’s too big,” King County Councilmember Reagan Dunn said. He thinks KCRHA should go for a lower price point.</p>

	<p>“Maybe \$500 million annually would be a fair amount if the strategies were working,” he said.</p> <p>Councilmember Dunn says his reservation about the plan goes beyond the price. He wants to make sure whatever plan moves forward addresses the root causes of the problem.</p> <p>"Housing is an important part of the overall solution, but that's only part of it. We've got to double down on things like substance use and addiction treatment,” Dunn said.</p> <p>KING 5 did reach out to KCRHA for an interview about their plan, and is working to arrange time for an interview to allow for further explanation of the proposal.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Vigil for pedestrian SPD patrol car hit, killed
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/vigil-place-intersection-where-23-year-old-was-hit-killed-by-spd-officer/JTCWTODFSJA2DBKIASZ4JCVQAA/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A vigil has been set up at the intersection of Dexter Avenue North and Thomas Street for 23-year-old Jaahnavi Kandula, the woman hit and killed by a Seattle Police Department patrol vehicle on Monday.</p> <p>Friday evening, dozens of cyclists dedicated their ride to Kandula. They started at Westlake Center and made their way to the intersection. For a moment, they blocked off Dexter Avenue and held a moment of silence.</p> <p>Several people walking in the area stopped by the vigil to pay their respects, telling KIRO 7 they are heartbroken knowing something like this can happen to anyone.</p> <p>Seattle police continue to investigate the accident, but many people at Friday’s vigil hope Kandula’s family can find peace.</p> <p>“We need to create, like, real police accountability so things like this don’t happen again,” Clio Jensen, who attended the vigil, said. “We need to uplift these calls for justice.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Tenino controversial sex offender facility
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/state-agencies-drop-out-of-meeting-discussing-controversial-sex-offender-facility-in-tenino
GIST	<p>TENINO, Wash. - A town hall meeting aimed at discussing a controversial sex offender treatment center in Tenino has been canceled due to threats, state agencies say.</p> <p>Residents for weeks have been pushing back against the treatment facility, owned by Supreme Living, LLC. The facility will house Level 3 sex-offenders—the so-called ‘worst of the worst’—moved from the state’s secure treatment center on McNeil Island.</p> <p>A meeting was scheduled Jan. 29, where the Department of Corrections, Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS) and the Thurston County Sheriff were to discuss the new facility with the public.</p> <p>The DOC and DSHS dropped out of the meeting on Jan. 27, citing "threats by individuals and... social media."</p> <p>Instead, they will host a public webinar on Feb. 1, the same day the first sex offender will be moved into the facility.</p>

	<p>"To say I'm infuriated and embarrassed is an understatement," wrote Thurston County Sheriff Derek Sanders. "The public deserves to hear answers directly, and in a meaningful, engaging way, from their state government."</p> <p>Sanders held the previously-scheduled Jan. 29 meeting late Sunday afternoon, sitting with two empty chairs to represent DOC and DSHS.</p> <p>FOX 13 News will attend the meeting to learn more information.</p> <p>The facility is scheduled to open Feb. 1, where they will receive their first resident.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Lynnwood opioid treatment center
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/lynnwood-opioid-treatment-clinic-expected-to-open-tomorrow
GIST	<p>LYNNWOOD, Wash. - The controversial Lynnwood opioid treatment clinic is expected to open Monday, Jan. 30.</p> <p>This comes after the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) issued a behavioral health agency license for Acadia Health to operate the treatment clinic Thursday.</p> <p>According to the Acadia Health website, the treatment clinic helps people in recovery by providing effective medications and counseling services.</p> <p>Some community members have expressed concerns for the treatment clinic, due to the proximity to the Boys & Girls Club and Alderwood Little League.</p> <p>DOH says the clinic location was approved by the city of Lynnwood back in March 2022.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Palestinian, Israeli violence continues
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/29/world/middleeast/palestinians-israelis-violence.html
GIST	<p>A Palestinian man was fatally shot outside an Israeli settlement in the West Bank and Israeli settlers carried out nearly 150 attacks against Palestinians and their properties across the region, according to reports on Sunday by Palestinian state media and the Israeli Army.</p> <p>Sunday's violence was the latest to grip the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Jerusalem since Thursday, in a series of raids and attacks that have left more than 20 people dead.</p> <p>The Israeli military said that the man who was shot on Sunday, Karam Salman, 18, was armed with a handgun and was killed by a settlement security team in Kedumim. The Palestinian official news agency, Wafa, reported that the circumstances of Mr. Salman's killing were unclear.</p> <p>The latest violence began on Thursday with a military raid in the Israeli-occupied West Bank in which 10 people were killed. A 24-year-old man who was wounded in the raid died of his injuries on Sunday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. Thursday's incursion, the Israeli military said, was aimed at apprehending members of the Islamic Jihad group who were involved in planning and executing multiple attacks on Israel. It was the deadliest military operation in the occupied West Bank in at least a half-decade.</p> <p>On Friday night, a Palestinian gunman killed seven people outside a synagogue in a Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, the deadliest attack on civilians in the city since 2008. And on Saturday, an attacker who the police said was 13 years old shot and injured two Israelis near another Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem.</p>

The Israeli police said in a statement on Sunday that they had arrested the relatives of the perpetrator of Friday night's attack, including his mother and uncle, as well as his neighbors. On Sunday morning, the police evicted and emptied the attacker's family home and sealed it off.

"His home will be demolished," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said.

Israel regularly demolishes the family homes of accused attackers, a practice that international rights groups and the United Nations have said amounts to collective punishment.

Palestinian officials said that across the West Bank on Saturday night and into early Sunday, Israeli settlers had carried out 144 attacks against Palestinian civilians or their properties. One official, Ghassan Daghlal, told Wafa that settlers had hurled stones at more than 100 motorists and vehicles and had set fire to six vehicles in a wave of [violence](#).

At least 22 Palestinian-owned shops were attacked and at least one Palestinian home near the city of Ramallah was set on fire by settlers, Palestinian media reported.

The Israeli police said they were investigating the home arson.

On Saturday night, a gunman opened fire on a restaurant in a settlement in the West Bank near the city of Jericho, the Israeli military said. After firing one bullet, the gunman fled the scene, the army said. No one was injured.

In several Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem, clashes broke out between the Israeli police, who were armed with rubber bullets and tear gas, and Palestinians, who had stones and firecrackers, according to Palestinian media. At least one Palestinian man was shot and injured by Israeli forces during the confrontations, Wafa reported.

Israel's new far-right government announced a number of measures on Saturday night to exact a price on Palestinian attackers and those who support them, it said. The government said it planned to expedite gun licenses for Israeli citizens, reinforce military and police units to carry out more arrests of Palestinians, and conduct operations aimed at seizing Palestinians' weapons.

In remarks on Sunday at his weekly cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Netanyahu said he wanted to expand and expedite the issuing of gun permits to thousands of Israeli civilians, including those in the rescue services. He singled out the 3,000 volunteer members of ZAKA, a search-and-rescue and paramedic organization.

"Imagine if they and others were armed," Mr. Netanyahu said.

The recent Palestinian attacks, including Friday night's shooting outside a synagogue and Saturday's shooting, have targeted Israeli settlements and settlers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The settlements are considered illegal under international law and by much of the international community.

Mr. Netanyahu's government said it would take steps to strengthen the settlements.

The violence has marked a bloody and deadly beginning to 2023, with the killings of at least 30 Palestinians, including five people under 18, and seven Israelis.

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HEADLINE	01/30 Russia convict fighters heading home
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/30/world/europe/wagner-convict-ukraine-russia.html
GIST	He was released from a Russian prison and thrown into battle in Ukraine with a promise of freedom, redemption and money. Now, Andrei Yastrebov, who was among tens of thousands of convict soldiers, is part of a return from the battlefield with potentially serious implications for Russian society.

Mr. Yastrebov, 22, who had been serving time for theft, returned home a changed man. “We all feel like he is in some sort of hypnosis, like he is a different person,” said a relative of his, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. “He is without any emotions.”

Thousands of convicts have been killed, many within days or even hours of arriving at the front, Russian rights advocates and Ukrainian officials say. Those who live and return home largely remain silent, wary of retribution if they speak out.

President Vladimir V. Putin’s decision to allow a mercenary group to recruit Russian convicts in support of his flagging war effort marks a watershed in his 23-year rule, say human rights activists and legal experts. The policy circumvents Russian legal precedent and, by returning some brutalized criminals to their homes with pardons, risks triggering greater violence throughout society, underlining the cost Mr. Putin is prepared to pay to avoid defeat.

Since July, around 40,000 inmates have joined the Russian forces, according to Western intelligence agencies, the Ukrainian government and a prisoners’ rights association, Russia Behind Bars, which combines reports from informers across Russian jails. Ukraine claims that nearly 30,000 have deserted or been killed or wounded, although that number could not be independently verified.

Most of the enlisted men were serving time for petty crimes like robbery and theft, but records from one penal colony seen by The New York Times show that the recruits also included men convicted of aggravated rape and multiple murders.

“There are no more crimes, and no more punishments,” said Olga Romanova, the head of Russia Behind Bars. “Anything is permissible now, and this brings very far-reaching consequences for any country.”

More than six months ago, Russia’s largest private military company, Wagner, and its founder, Yevgeny Prigozhin, [began systematically recruiting convicts](#) on a scale not seen since World War II to bolster a [bloody assault](#) on the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut. Yet the operation remains largely cloaked in secrecy and propaganda.

Wagner has been able to avoid oversight by exploiting the most marginalized Russian citizens, the 350,000 male inmates of its harsh penal colonies, said human rights activists and lawyers.

Dozens of survivors from the first inmate assault units [began filtering back to Russia](#) this month with medals, sizable payouts and documents that Wagner claims grant them freedom. The releases are likely to accelerate as Wagner’s six-month service contracts expire, potentially confronting Russian society with the challenge of reintegrating thousands of traumatized men with military training, a history of crime and few job prospects.

“These are psychologically broken people who are returning with a sense of righteousness, a belief that they have killed to defend the Motherland,” said Yana Gelmel, a Russian prisoner rights lawyer who works with enlisted inmates. “These can be very dangerous people.”

Neither Mr. Prigozhin, through his press office, nor Russia’s penal service provided comment.

To document the recruitment drive, The Times interviewed rights activists, lawyers, legal workers, relatives of recruited inmates, deserters and prisoners who decided to remain behind bars but maintain contact with companions on the front lines.

They described a sophisticated system of incentives and brutality built by Wagner, with the Kremlin’s support, to refill Russia’s decimated military ranks using questionable, and possibly illegal, methods.

Andrei Medvedev said he joined Wagner within days of finishing his prison term for theft in southern Russia. A former convict with military experience, he says he was put in charge of a detachment of prisoners who were dispatched on nearly suicidal missions around Bakhmut.

“We were told: ‘Keep going until you’re killed,’” Mr. Medvedev said in a phone interview from Russia after deserting in November. He has since escaped to Norway and applied for political asylum.

The campaign to recruit convicts began in early July, when Mr. Prigozhin started appearing in prisons around his native St. Petersburg with a radical proposal for the inmates: paying their debt to society by joining his private army in Ukraine.

In [videos published on social media](#), Mr. Prigozhin promised the prisoners they would receive 100,000 rubles a month — the equivalent of \$1,700 at the time, and nearly double Russia’s average monthly wage. He also offered bravery bonuses, \$80,000 death payouts and, should they survive the six-month contract, freedom in the form of a presidential pardon.

Those who ran away, used drugs or alcohol or had sexual relations, he warned, would be killed.

“There are no chances of returning to the colony,” Mr. Prigozhin [said in a speech to inmates](#) published in September. “Those who get there and say ‘I think I’m in the wrong place’ will be marked as deserters and shot.”

A [former inmate himself](#), Mr. Prigozhin, understood prison culture, skillfully combining a threat of punishment with a promise of [a new, dignified life](#), according to rights activists and families.

“He didn’t go for the money, he was too proud for that,” said Anastasia, about a relative who enlisted with Wagner as a prisoner. “He went because he was ashamed in front of his mother, he wanted to clear his name.”

Mr. Prigozhin’s prison visits immediately raised legal questions. Mercenary recruitment is illegal in Russia, and until last year Mr. Prigozhin had denied that Wagner even existed.

On paper, the prisoners never went to war, but were merely transferred to Russian jails near the Ukrainian border, according to information requests filed by their relatives.

When Anastasia, who asked that her last name not be used, tried to find the whereabouts of her enlisted relative at his prison, she said the guards merely told her that he was unavailable.

Igor Matyukhin was a convicted thief who decided to join.

A 26-year-old Siberian orphan, Mr. Matyukhin said he was serving his third sentence in the remote Krasnoyarsk region when Mr. Prigozhin arrived by helicopter in November, offering eventual freedom in return for enlistment.

Driven by the chance of a new life, Mr. Matyukhin immediately signed up. Days later, he was at a training camp near the occupied Ukrainian city of Luhansk. What he found there, he said, was very different from the patriotic band of brothers he had been led to expect.

Mr. Matyukhin described a climate of fear instilled by Wagner to keep convicts fighting. He said they were threatened with summary executions, and at least one man in his unit was taken away after disobeying orders and never returned.

When his training camp came under a surprise Ukrainian attack, Mr. Matyukhin seized the opportunity to escape in the confusion. He said he has since been trying to return to his prison from a hiding place in Russia.

	<p>A relative of Mr. Matyukhin confirmed that he had enlisted in Wagner, but other aspects of his war account could not be independently verified.</p> <p>To lift declining recruitment numbers, Wagner has lately been playing up the rewards for survivors, releasing videos of returned prisoners being granted freedom.</p> <p>“I needed your criminal talents to kill the enemy in the war,” Mr. Prigozhin said in one video. “Those who want to return, we are waiting for you to come back. Those who want to get married, get baptized, study — go ahead with a blessing.”</p> <p>In some videos, the inmates are given papers described as pardons or annulments of convictions. However, none of these documents have been made public, raising questions about their legitimacy. Rights advocates say pardons are rare, time-consuming and complex legal procedures that have never been issued in Russia on anywhere near the scale advertised by Wagner.</p> <p>Only Mr. Putin can issue a pardon under the Russian Constitution, and the Kremlin has not published such decrees since 2020. In 2021, Mr. Putin pardoned just six people, according to the Kremlin.</p> <p>Mr. Putin’s press secretary, Dmitri S. Peskov, on Friday told reporters that Wagner’s enlisted convicts are being pardoned “in strict adherence to Russian law.” He declined further comment, implying the procedure was a state secret.</p> <p>“There are open decrees and decrees with various degrees of secrecy,” he said.</p> <p>Under Russian law, all pardon petitions are evaluated by specialized regional committees before arriving at the Kremlin. However, two members of such commissions said they had not received any petitions from enlisted convicts. One of those officials represents the city of St. Petersburg, the residence of Mr. Yastrebov.</p> <p>Rights activists say the returning inmates’ ambiguous legal status undermines Russia’s justice system and ties their fate to Wagner.</p> <p>After spending just three weeks at home, Mr. Yastrebov said he was already getting ready to return to the front, despite the extraordinary casualty rates suffered by his prison’s unit, according to Russia Behind Bars.</p> <p>“I want to defend the Motherland,” he said in a brief interview on Friday. “I liked everything over there. The civilian life is boring.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Israel launched drone attack Iran facility?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/29/world/middleeast/iran-drone-strike-israel.html
GIST	<p>TEL AVIV — A drone attack on an Iranian military facility that resulted in a large explosion in the center of the city of Isfahan on Saturday was the work of the Mossad, Israel’s premier intelligence agency, according to senior intelligence officials who were familiar with the dialogue between Israel and the United States about the incident.</p> <p>The facility’s purpose was not clear, and neither was how much damage the strike caused. But Isfahan is a major center of missile production, research and development for Iran, including the assembly of many of its Shahab medium-range missiles, which can reach Israel and beyond.</p> <p>Weeks ago, American officials publicly identified Iran as the primary supplier of drones to Russia for use in the war in Ukraine, and they said they believed Russia was also trying to obtain Iranian missiles to use in the conflict. But U.S. officials said they believed this strike was prompted by Israel’s concerns about its own security, not the potential for missile exports to Russia.</p>

The strike came just as Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken was beginning a visit to Israel, his first since [Benjamin Netanyahu returned to office](#) as prime minister. The director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William J. Burns, visited Israel last week, though it is not clear anything about the operation in Isfahan was discussed.

American officials quickly sent out word on Sunday morning that the United States was not responsible for the attack. One official confirmed that it had been conducted by Israel but did not have details about the target. Sometimes Israel gives the United States advance warning of an attack or informs American officials as an operation is being launched. It is unclear what happened in this case.

Isfahan is the site of four small nuclear research facilities, all supplied by China many years ago. But the facility that was struck on Saturday was in the middle of the city and did not appear to be nuclear-related.

Iran made no effort to hide the fact that an attack had happened, but said it had done little damage. In statements, senior Iranian officials contended that the drones — apparently quadcopters, a kind of aircraft with four separate propellers — had all been shot down.

Iran's official news agency, IRNA, reported on Sunday that the drones had targeted an ammunition manufacturing plant, and that they had been shot down by a surface-to-air defense system. It is not clear why Iran would build an ammunition production plant in the middle of a city of roughly two million people.

Iran's foreign minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, said at a news conference in Tehran on Sunday that “a cowardly drone attack on a military site in central Iran will not impede Iran's progress on its peaceful nuclear program.”

This is Israel's first known attack inside Iran since Mr. Netanyahu reassumed office, and it may indicate that he has adopted the strategy formed under his two predecessors and political rivals, Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, who expanded Israeli attacks inside Iran.

The quadcopters have become a signature of such operations.

In August 2019, Israel sent an [exploding quadcopter](#) into the heart of a Hezbollah-dominated neighborhood in Beirut, Lebanon, to destroy what Israeli officials described as machinery vital to the production of precision missiles.

In June 2021, [quadcopters exploded](#) at one of Iran's main manufacturing centers for centrifuges, which purify uranium at the country's [two major uranium enrichment facilities](#), Fordow and Natanz. That attack was in Karaj, on the outskirts of Tehran. Iran claimed that there was no damage to the site, but satellite images showed evidence of significant damage.

A year ago, [six quadcopters exploded](#) at Kermanshah, Iran's main manufacturing and storage plant for military drones.

And in May 2022, a drone strike targeted a [highly sensitive military site](#) outside Tehran where Iran develops missile, nuclear and drone technology.

The targets — presumably including the military facility in Isfahan — have been chosen in part to shake the Iranian leadership, because they demonstrate intelligence about the locations of key sites, even those hidden in the middle of cities.

But the strikes also reflect a change in Israeli strategy made after Mr. Bennett became prime minister in June 2021. He lasted a year in the post.

Mr. Bennett says in a forthcoming YouTube video shared with The New York Times that he decided to “create a price tag” and strike inside Iran in response to any attack on Israelis or Jews around the world. “The Iranians beat us, and soldiers die on the border,” Mr. Bennett says in the self-produced interview, while Iranian leaders “sit quietly in Tehran and we do nothing to them.”

It was not just the quadcopter attacks.

After “Iran tried to murder Israelis in Cyprus, in Turkey,” Mr. Bennett says, the Revolutionary Guards Corps commander behind it “was eliminated in Tehran.” He is referring to the assassination of Sayad Khodayee, who Israel claimed was a leader of a covert unit responsible for the abduction and killing of Israelis and other foreigners around the world.

After Israel adopted the new strategy, Mr. Bennett says in the video, President Biden, during a meeting, made a “sharp request” that Israel inform the United States in advance “of any action we take in Iran.”

Mr. Bennett refused, he says.

“There are things you do not want to know about in advance,” he recalls telling the American president.

The intelligence communities of Israel and the United States clashed on the issue in April 2021 after an operation by the Mossad to blow up bunkers at the Natanz enrichment site surprised the United States.

Mr. Burns called his counterpart at the Mossad at the time, Yossi Cohen, to [express concern over the snub](#). Mr. Cohen said that the belated notification was the result of operational constraints and uncertainty about when the Natanz operation would take place.

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HEADLINE	01/29 Barrage: 71 commands in 13 minutes
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/29/us/tyre-nichols-video-assault-cops.html
GIST	<p>Police officers unleashed a barrage of commands that were confusing, conflicting and sometimes even impossible to obey, a Times analysis of footage from Tyre Nichols’s fatal traffic stop found. When Mr. Nichols could not comply — and even when he managed to — the officers responded with escalating force.</p> <p>The review of the available footage found that officers shouted at least 71 commands during the approximately 13-minute period before they reported over the radio that Mr. Nichols was officially in custody. The orders were issued at two locations, one near Mr. Nichols’s vehicle and the other in the area he had fled to and where he would be severely beaten. The orders were often simultaneous and contradictory. Officers commanded Mr. Nichols to show his hands even as they were holding his hands. They told him to get on the ground even when he was on the ground. And they ordered him to reposition himself even when they had control of his body.</p> <p>Experts say the actions of the Memphis police officers were an egregious example of a longstanding problem in policing in which officers physically punish civilians for perceived disrespect or disobedience — sometimes called “contempt of cop.” The practice was notoriously prevalent decades ago.</p> <p>“It was far more rampant in the ’80s, when I started doing police work, than it was in the ’90s or 2000s,” said Geoffrey Alpert, a professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of South Carolina. “Even before body cams, cops were getting more professional and wouldn’t make it personal, like it seemed to be in this case. This is just — it’s so far out of the norm.”</p> <p>To mitigate the potential for escalation and confusion during police encounters, today’s police training typically calls for a single officer at the scene to issue clear and specific commands. It also requires police officers to respond professionally and proportionately to any perceived act of defiance.</p>

But The Times's review shows that the officers did the exact opposite, over and over.

The available footage does not show any sign that the officers present intervened to stop the aggressive use of force. If anything, it shows the contrary.

At one point, footage captured an officer saying "I hope they stomp his ass" after Mr. Nichols's attempt to flee the scene.

When asked for comment on the officers' conduct at the traffic stop, a spokesperson from the Memphis Police Department said: "All information that is available at this point has been released. However, know that this investigation remains ongoing." The Memphis Police Association also said it could not comment because of the ongoing investigation.

The Times's analysis is based on footage from police body cams and street cameras released by the City of Memphis and synchronized by The Times.

Here are four key moments in which officers punished Mr. Nichols for not complying with flawed commands. These videos contain scenes of graphic violence.

Confusing Orders

The footage begins with a police officer driving up to the intersection where Mr. Nichols's car had been boxed in by two unmarked police vehicles.

The officer jumps out with his firearm drawn and joins a pair of officers rushing toward the front seat.

One officer pulls Mr. Nichols out of his car, and all three officers immediately start screaming "On the ground!"

These are the first orders in the bombardment of confusing commands that confound Mr. Nichols and prompt a cascade of retribution.

Mr. Nichols points out that he is sitting on the ground, as the officers instructed him to do.

But multiple officers shout the same command over and over with intensifying frustration and physical threats.

"Get on the ground!" one orders. "I'm gonna tase your ass."

It eventually becomes evident that the officers would like Mr. Nichols not only on the ground but also lying down.

When Mr. Nichols repositions himself, it appears to further antagonize the officers. He tries to convey that he poses no threat.

"You guys are really doing a lot right now," he says. "I'm just trying to go home."

With officers pinning down his arms, pressing a taser against his leg and barking intensifying verbal threats, Mr. Nichols explodes: "I am on the ground!"

Finally, one of the officers yells more specific instructions: "On your stomach."

Three seconds later, one of the officers shoots pepper spray into Mr. Nichols's face.

Contradictory Commands

After fleeing on foot, Mr. Nichols is seen lying on the ground a few hundred yards away from his car, flanked by officers demanding that he give them his hands. But one of them is gripping his left arm, and the other is holding his right. It's not clear how the officers expect Mr. Nichols to move.

Then a third officer runs up with a can of pepper spray.

"You're about to get sprayed good," he says. The others start punching Mr. Nichols's face.

Mr. Nichols responds by pulling his hands back to protect himself. The punching intensifies, and the pepper spray is fired.

Wiping the pepper spray from his eyes, Mr. Nichols tries assuring them that he is going to comply.

"OK," he says. "All right. All right."

But just as one of the officers gets hold of him, a new officer arrives and also demands that Mr. Nichols give him his hands. Again, Mr. Nichols is unable to follow the conflicting directions. He flails about, which only multiplies the police officers' commands and the physical punishment they inflict. He is doused with pepper spray for a third time.

Orders Not Resisted

Two officers stand above Mr. Nichols, who is lying on his side and rubbing his eyes after being pepper-sprayed three times. An officer kicks Mr. Nichols in the face. Mr. Nichols appears to be barely conscious or coherent, but officers treat him as if he is resisting orders.

"Lay flat, goddamn it," one officer commands.

Mr. Nichols moans and writhes on the ground. By this point, he has been tased, kicked in the head twice and punched and pepper-sprayed repeatedly.

"Lay flat," another officer shouts.

Mr. Nichols is lying limp as an officer, without any apparent difficulty, snaps a pair of handcuffs to one of his wrists.

Impossible Orders

Officers continue to issue commands while simultaneously constraining, controlling and beating Mr. Nichols in ways that render it physically impossible for him to follow those commands.

One officer uses Mr. Nichols's handcuffed arm to pull his body from the ground and into a kneeling position. Then another officer strikes him with a baton three times, yelling "Give us your hands!"

Surrounded by four officers, he tries to move away from the baton.

"Give me your fucking hands!" one officer shouts.

But Mr. Nichols — with one officer pinning his arms behind his back, another gripping his handcuffed wrist and a third punching his face — cannot comply.

Mr. Nichols doubles over and calls out for his mother. The blows continue.

Five officers have been fired and charged with second-degree murder. Lawyers for two of them said in a news conference last week that their clients intended to plead not guilty.

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/29/us/emt-tyre-nichols-response-video.html
GIST	<p>MEMPHIS — Tyre Nichols writhed in pain on the pavement after being beaten by Memphis police officers. His back was against a police car, his hands were cuffed and his face was bloody. He was groaning, and he kept falling over.</p> <p>A few feet away, two emergency medical workers looked on. They helped Mr. Nichols sit up a few times after he had slumped to his side, but then, for nearly seven minutes, they did not touch him. At one point, they walked away.</p> <p>Mr. Nichols, a father and FedEx worker who liked photography and skateboarding, died in a hospital three days later. Five officers were fired and have been charged with second-degree murder in his death.</p> <p>Videos of the Jan. 7 beating released on Friday have led people to scrutinize those officers' actions frame by frame. But the footage has also turned the public's attention to the emergency medical workers who first arrived on the scene after the beating, raising the question of whether they should or could have done more to help Mr. Nichols.</p> <p>"It seems like they did not have the decent humanity to render aid to a man who was, at first, calling for his mother, but then laying against the car," said JB Smiley Jr., the vice chairman of the Memphis City Council.</p> <p>Both of the medical workers who arrived first to tend to Mr. Nichols appeared to be emergency medical technicians with the Memphis Fire Department. Fire E.M.T.s often respond more quickly than ambulance crews to emergency calls, but their job is largely to carry out fundamental first aid: conducting a basic neurological assessment, making sure patients can breathe, checking their vital signs and stemming any major bleeding.</p> <p>Qwanesha Ward, a spokeswoman for the Fire Department, said on Friday that the department had suspended two of its E.M.T.s who had treated Mr. Nichols and that an investigation was expected to wrap up early this week. She declined to identify the medics.</p> <p>To many in Memphis, the videos were troubling, appearing to show the medical workers responding without urgency to Mr. Nichols's suffering.</p> <p>Experts in emergency medicine noted that the first medics on a scene were often the least trained and frequently relied in part on the police — who, in this case, said Mr. Nichols was on drugs — to understand a patient's condition.</p> <p>Dr. Sean Montgomery, a trauma expert at Duke University's medical school, said that it was difficult to evaluate the medical response, given the low quality of the nearby surveillance camera, but that the responding medical personnel did not seem to have followed standard protocol, which calls for stopping any major bleeding and then assessing a patient's airway and breathing.</p> <p>He said it was not clear that anyone had begun to fully assess Mr. Nichols, in line with those standards, until about 15 minutes after the medics had arrived. That is when medics can be seen going into their bag of tools and treatments. At that point, it had been 21 minutes since an officer last kicked Mr. Nichols.</p> <p>"The patient clearly seems to be in shock and have trouble breathing, even with the poor camera view," Dr. Montgomery wrote in an email, adding that emergency response crews are often undertrained and underfunded.</p> <p>Dr. Alan Tyroch, the chief of surgery and trauma at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in El Paso, said he had watched a video of the response several times but had found the quality so poor that it was nearly impossible to evaluate what medical care was being provided, or by whom.</p>

“Nobody really knows except the people who were there,” he said.

An ambulance pulled up to the scene more than 25 minutes after the police officers had stopped beating Mr. Nichols. Medical response times have been a problem in many cities, including Memphis, where officials have said they are experiencing a rise in 911 calls, straining the system.

In recent years, the Memphis firefighters’ union has tried to calm fears about slow response times by noting that Fire Department E.M.T.s often show up before more skilled paramedics and ambulance units do. Union officials did not respond to inquiries, and the Fire Department did not respond to questions about the specifics of its response.

Mr. Nichols suffered his fatal injuries after police officers kicked, punched and used a baton to beat him. They said later that they had pulled him over because he was driving recklessly. The police had pulled him out of his car and ordered him onto the ground, continuing to yell at him and threaten him even as he lay on his side, pleading with them to stop. When one officer pepper-sprayed him, he got up and ran in the direction of his mother’s house, but officers caught him about 200 feet from her home and began to pummel him.

Afterward, some officers dragged a handcuffed Mr. Nichols to a police car and propped him up against it. In the first five minutes that the medics were on the scene, Mr. Nichols fell to his side six times. The medics helped him up several times and at one point asked a police officer to shine a light on him.

At that point, several Memphis officers can be heard insisting that Mr. Nichols, 29, must be high, and they sound surprised to have learned that nothing was found in his pockets or in the car.

Some laughed as they recalled their assault in detail. “Man, I was hitting him with straight haymakers, dog,” one said. It is not clear from the body camera videos whether the medics heard those conversations.

Among the seven felony charges filed against each of the officers is an accusation that they refrained from performing a duty that was either imposed by law or was inherent as part of their jobs. This could cover a range of behavior, but the Shelby County district attorney, Steven J. Mulroy, suggested at a news conference last week that the charge had to do in part with their communications with medical officials.

On-duty police officers, Mr. Mulroy said, have a duty “to prevent official misconduct and to accurately report information to medical personnel who show up.”

The officers have not entered a plea. Lawyers for the officers have cautioned people to wait for more details before judging them. Blake Ballin, who represents Desmond Mills Jr., one of the five officers, said in a statement that the videos have “produced as many questions as they have answers.”

At the scene, the medics at times appeared to defer to the police, standing back at one point as a police officer asked Mr. Nichols what drugs he had taken. Mr. Nichols largely groaned in response, though twice he appears to answer “alcohol.”

For about the next 6 minutes and 40 seconds, no one touches Mr. Nichols as he rolls back and forth on the pavement.

The official cause of Mr. Nichols’s death has not been released by the Shelby County medical examiner’s office. The family said it had commissioned a separate, private autopsy that determined he had suffered from extensive bleeding.

When a young person like Mr. Nichols dies three days after a beating involving blows to the head, Dr. Montgomery said, brain injuries are the most likely cause. He said that, based on video of the beating,

	<p>Mr. Nichols had likely been at risk for severe traumatic brain injury, rib fractures, collapsed lungs and internal bleeding.</p> <p>Dr. Montgomery said it was not easy to say whether getting Mr. Nichols into an ambulance or to the hospital more quickly would have made a difference, though some cases, such as a brain injury, would have been helped by early surgery.</p> <p>“Some brain injuries are too severe for medical care to improve them,” he added. “However, if you manage the other injuries well, the brain will do better. For example, if the patient is not breathing well, the brain will have a much worse outcome.”</p> <p>The police in Memphis have said that Mr. Nichols was taken to the hospital after complaining about shortness of breath.</p> <p>At a march on Saturday in response to the police killing, some Memphis residents said they were nearly as disturbed by the medical response as they were by the officers’ actions. Towanna Murphy, who operates a radio station in Memphis, said the medics needed to be held accountable.</p> <p>“When you see somebody laying there,” Ms. Murphy said, “you’re supposed to give medical treatment right away.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Study: Covid increases risk of heart attack
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/27/covid-19-increases-risk-heart-attack-says-uk-study/
GIST	<p>It’s not just the lungs. Mounting evidence shows that COVID-19 can invade the heart or spark so much inflammation during the immune response that it weakens the critical organ, raising the risk of heart attacks, strokes and other cardiac chaos.</p> <p>A British study published this month found that patients with COVID-19 were four times likelier to develop major cardiovascular disease in the acute phase of infection than those uninfected. Even after the worst of their illness was over, they were 40% likelier to experience cardiac problems than the control group.</p> <p>“The findings indicate that patients with COVID-19 should be monitored for at least a year after recovering from the acute illness to diagnose cardiovascular complications of the infection, which form part of long COVID,” said Ian C.K. Wong, a study author and professor of pharmacy at the University of Hong Kong.</p> <p>The research comes on top of a massive study of U.S. veterans last year that found those infected by the coronavirus were at greater risk of heart attack, stroke, blood clots, irregular heartbeats and myocarditis, which is inflammation of the heart muscle.</p> <p>“It’s truly not only a respiratory disease. In some patients, they can develop heart problems as a result of [coronavirus] infection,” said Ziyad Al-Aly, chief of research and development service at the Department of Veterans Affairs’ health care system in St. Louis and a clinical epidemiologist at Washington University, also in the Missouri city.</p> <p>Doctors hypothesize that the virus can invade heart cells by unlocking key cell receptors. In other cases, inflammation from the immune response may cause collateral damage to the heart.</p> <p>The phenomenon is similar to one found in certain influenza patients who have a greater risk of heart attack for two weeks to a month after the illness.</p> <p>“We know that this is not just a COVID-specific phenomenon,” said William Schaffner, an infectious disease specialist at Vanderbilt University.</p>

Panagis Galiatsatos, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine who sees patients, said COVID-19 problems can occur in active COVID-19 infections and long COVID, the blanket term for long-term effects such as brain fog, dizziness and changes in smell or taste in people who have recovered from coronavirus infection.

He said in some long COVID patients, the virus causes a debilitating phenomenon akin to postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, or POTS, in which people who stand up feel lightheadedness and faint and have rapid heartbeats.

In active cases, the virus has the ability to bind to the ACE2 receptor on cells in the lungs and heart and cause myocarditis.

“We have seen this often in patients, which results in a type of heart failure,” Dr. Galiatsatos said.

In some people, the body’s immune response to the virus invader causes havoc. An elevated release of proteins known as cytokines can result in a cytokine storm, sparking inflammation and damaging key organs such as the heart.

Researchers at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles say reported heart attacks increased after the first year of the pandemic and surged with spikes in the coronavirus, including omicron, with higher relative increases in cardiac problems among younger adults.

Heart attacks rose 14% in the first year of the pandemic compared with the year before. The uptick reversed a decadeslong improvement in avoiding cardiac deaths. The problem has persisted, even during surges in newer variants that were thought to be milder than earlier strains.

The problem was found across all age groups, but the highest relative rise was among younger adults — an increase of 29.9% for those ages 25-44, 19.6% for ages 45-64 and 13.7% for 65 and older.

“We found that the young-aged females and males were hit hardest. We also showed that this trend persisted through the early months of the omicron outbreak,” said Dr. Yee Hui Yeo, a Cedars-Sinai physician-scientist and first author of the study.

Actuaries in Australia recently reported that heart attacks were 17% higher than normal over the first eight months of 2022 as the island nation grappled with surges in the virus after strict lockdowns earlier in the pandemic.

A high-profile study published in early 2022 compared more than 150,000 COVID-19 survivors in the Department of Veterans Affairs health care database to large control groups.

Even those without underlying health conditions or who had relatively mild infections that did not require hospitalization were at elevated risk, the researchers said.

Heart disease occurred in 4% more patients who had COVID-19 than those who did not. That would translate to 3 million people in the U.S. with cardiac complications because of COVID-19.

Dr. Al-Aly, who was involved in the study, advised keeping the spinoff risks from COVID-19 in perspective. Of 100 people you know who get COVID-19, “maybe 95% are going to be just fine,” he said.

He said clinicians should be on the lookout for cardiac issues and symptoms in those who have been infected.

“I think we should be cognizant of heart risks,” he said. “Getting that diagnosis early and treating those persons early is better than leaving it untreated for several years.”

	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told The Washington Times, “People with COVID-19 appear to have a higher occurrence of a number of heart-related conditions in the months following infection compared to those who did not have COVID-19. CDC is continuing to track the impact of COVID-19 and post-COVID conditions across multiple organ systems, including the heart.”</p> <p>Doctors told The Times that risks are more pronounced in the unvaccinated than the vaccinated, so getting updated boosters should be considered smart for your heart. Only about 15% of eligible Americans have received the latest booster shot.</p> <p>“There are so many people who have not taken advantage of the bivalent vaccine. If you’re worried about heart disease as a consequence of COVID, how about running to the pharmacy for 15 minutes and no money, because it’s free, and getting your booster?” Dr. Schaffner said.</p> <p>Officials have documented reports of myocarditis in those who have received COVID-19 vaccines, particularly in young men.</p> <p>Doctors said it’s important to recognize that vaccine injury can be serious, though there is less risk than from COVID-19 itself.</p> <p>One study published in Nature estimated that there were 10 extra myocarditis cases per 1 million people who received two doses of an mRNA vaccine versus 40 incidents of myocarditis per 1 million among those who were infected by the virus.</p> <p>Scientists have found that most of the people who get myocarditis from the vaccine recover.</p> <p>“If it occurs, it is transient and not life-threatening. However, COVID-related myocarditis is more common and more of a health concern,” Dr. Galiatsatos said. “The vaccines may play a role in preventing COVID-19-related myocarditis, so it is a great therapy to assist in overall heart care.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Russia students mandatory military training
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/29/russia-orders-mandatory-military-training-secondar/
GIST	<p>Secondary school students in Russia will be required to take military training as part of their curriculum, highlighting the warring nation’s increasingly militarized atmosphere, British military intelligence officials said Sunday.</p> <p>In recent weeks, the Russian Ministry of Education has rolled out details about the training, which is expected to become mandatory in September, U.K. officials said in an intelligence update on Twitter.</p> <p>The “Basics of Life Safety” course will include training with AK series assault rifles and hand grenades, military drill and salutes, and the use of personal protective equipment.</p> <p>In December, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education announced a similar mandatory military training program for university students.</p> <p>It wasn’t clear whether the military training order for secondary students is linked to Russia’s faltering war in Ukraine, now in its 11th month. Such training was required in Russian schools up to 1993, British military officials said, adding that the latest program is most likely a deliberate “evocation of the Soviet Union.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Day 341 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/30/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-341-of-the-invasion

- **Russian shelling of residential areas in Ukraine's southern city of Kherson left at least three people dead and five injured, local authorities said.** The Kherson regional military administration said on its Telegram channel that Russian forces targeted a hospital, school, bus station, post office, bank and residential buildings in a strike on Sunday.
- **A missile hit an apartment building in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, killing one person and injuring others, according to the regional governor.** Oleh Synehubov said the missile struck the city centre on Sunday.
- **Ukraine's military and Russia's Wagner private military group are both claiming to have control in the area of Blahodatne, eastern Donetsk region.** "Units of Ukraine's defence forces repelled the attacks of the occupiers in the areas of ... Blahodatne ... in the Donetsk region," Ukraine's military reported, adding its forces also repelled attacks in 13 other settlements in the Donetsk region. Wagner, designated by the US as transnational criminal organisation, said on the Telegram messaging app on Saturday that its units had taken control of Blahodatne.
- **President Tayyip Erdoğan signalled that Turkey may agree to Finland joining Nato without Sweden,** amid growing tensions with Stockholm. "We may deliver Finland a different message [on their Nato application] and Sweden would be shocked when they see our message. But Finland should not make the same mistake Sweden did," Erdoğan said in a televised speech aired on Sunday. Sweden and Finland applied last year to join Nato and need all member countries' approval to join. Turkey and Hungary are holding out.
- **Vladimir Putin was open to contacts with Germany's chancellor, Olaf Scholz, though no phone call was scheduled,** a Kremlin spokesperson told the state Ria Novosti news agency. Scholz told the Berlin daily Tagesspiegel: "I will also speak to Putin again – because it is necessary to speak."
- **Kyiv and its western allies are engaged in "fast-track" talks on the possibility of equipping Ukraine with long-range missiles and military aircraft,** a top aide to Ukraine's president said. Mykhailo Podolyak said Ukraine's supporters in the west "understand how the war is developing" and the need to supply planes capable of providing cover for armoured vehicles the US and Germany have pledged.
- **US military officials are reportedly urging the Pentagon to supply F-16 jets to Ukraine** so it is better able to defend itself from Russian missiles and drones.
- **Olaf Scholz reiterated on Sunday that Germany will not send fighter jets.** "I can only advise against entering into a constant bidding war when it comes to weapons systems," Scholz said in an interview with the Tagesspiegel newspaper. "If, as soon as a decision [on tanks] has been made, the next debate starts in Germany, that doesn't come across as serious and undermines citizens' confidence in government decisions."
- **Russia's ministry of education has provided further details on plans to include basic military training in secondary schools, according to British intelligence.** The UK's Ministry of Defence (MoD) said on Sunday that the module "will include training with AK series assault rifles and hand grenades, military drill and salutes". It added that the initiatives, to come into force in September, were most likely a deliberate "evocation of the Soviet Union" as similar training took place in schools up until 1993.
- **Volodymyr Zelenskiy has stepped up his campaign to keep Russian athletes out of the 2024 Paris Games.** Ukraine's president said he had sent a letter to Emmanuel Macron, and allowing Russia to compete would be tantamount to showing that "terror is somehow acceptable".
- **Ukraine has imposed sanctions against 182 Russian and Belarusian companies, and three individuals,** in the latest of a series of steps to block Moscow's and Minsk's connections to Ukraine. The sanctioned companies chiefly engage in the transportation of goods, vehicle leasing and chemical production, according to the list published by Ukraine's national security and defence council.
- **Mourners gathered in Kyiv on Sunday to commemorate a British volunteer killed while on a rescue mission from the eastern Ukrainian town of Soledar.** British voluntary aid worker Andrew Bagshaw and fellow volunteer Chris Parry were [killed during an attempted humanitarian evacuation](#).

HEADLINE	01/29 Finland into NATO without Sweden?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/30/erdogan-says-turkey-may-accept-finland-into-nato-without-sweden
GIST	<p>Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said for the first time that Ankara could accept Finland into Nato without its Nordic neighbour Sweden.</p> <p>Erdoğan's comments during a televised meeting with younger voters came days after Ankara suspended Nato accession talks with the two countries.</p> <p>Its decision threatened to derail Nato's hopes of expanding the bloc to 32 countries at a summit planned for July in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius.</p> <p>Finland and Sweden dropped decades of military non-alignment and applied to join the defence alliance in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Turkey and Hungary remain the only members to have failed to ratify the two bids by votes in parliament.</p> <p>The Hungarian legislature is expected to approve both bids in February.</p> <p>But Erdoğan has dug in his heels heading into a tightly contested 14 May election in which he is trying to energise his conservative and nationalist support base.</p> <p>Erdoğan's main complaint has been with Sweden's refusal to extradite dozens of suspects that Ankara links to outlawed Kurdish militants and a failed 2016 coup attempt.</p> <p>He drew a clear distinction on Sunday between the positions taken by Sweden and Finland in the past few months.</p> <p>"If necessary, we can give a different response concerning Finland. Sweden will be shocked when we give a different response for Finland," Erdoğan said.</p> <p>He also repeated his demand for Sweden to hand over suspects sought by Ankara.</p> <p>"If you absolutely want to join Nato you will return these terrorists to us," Erdoğan said.</p> <p>Sweden has a bigger Kurdish diaspora than Finland and a more serious dispute with Ankara.</p> <p>Both countries have been trying to break down Erdoğan's resistance through months of delicate talks.</p> <p>Sweden has approved a constitutional amendment that enables it to enact tougher anti-terror laws demanded by Ankara.</p> <p>And both nations have lifted bans on military sales to Turkey that they imposed after its 2019 military incursion into Syria.</p> <p>But Ankara reacted with fury to a decision by the Swedish police to allow a protest at which a far-right extremist burned a copy of the Qur'an outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm earlier this month.</p> <p>Ankara has also been outraged by a Swedish prosecutor's decision not to press charges against a Kurdish support group that hung an effigy of Erdogan by its ankles outside Stockholm City Court.</p> <p>Swedish officials have roundly condemned the protests but defended their country's broad acceptance of free speech.</p>

	<p>The standoff between Ankara and Stockholm prompted Finnish officials to hint for the first time last week that they might be forced to seek Nato membership without Sweden.</p> <p>The two nations had sought to join the bloc together from the start.</p> <p>“We have to assess the situation, whether something has happened that in the longer term would prevent Sweden from going ahead,” Finnish foreign minister Pekka Haavisto said last Tuesday.</p> <p>But Haavisto also stressed that a joint accession remains the “first option”.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Chechen battalions siding w/Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/30/chechen-dzhokhar-dudayev-battalion-kyiv-ukraine-putin-ramzan-kadyrov
GIST	<p>For all their efforts fighting for Ukraine in the eastern city of Bakhmut, if the Chechen volunteers’ Dzhokhar Dudayev battalion was a football club it would be Millwall. Nobody likes us, their fans sing, and “we don’t care”, says Tor, 38, with a laugh.</p> <p>“Once I heard from one Ukrainian: ‘You can do what do you want here in Ukraine, but you will still in our opinion be terrorists and gangsters,’” says the Chechen private, who asked to be identified only by his call sign. “And I said: ‘You know what [is] the difference between me and you, or my nation and yours? We don’t care what Ukrainians think about us, we don’t care what Americans, Russians or British think of us. In truth, we do not care what the Chechens think of us.’ Yeah. We have to do what we have to do, you know.”</p> <p>The Kremlin-backed Ramzan Kadyrov’s infamous Chechen militia is a well-known entity. Disparagingly known as the TikTok army for their tendency to perform military theatrics on camera for the purpose of social media shares, their main claim to fame is a record of terrorising civilians abroad and at home, where Kadyrov rules through cruelty and fear.</p> <p>Less well known, perhaps, are the three Chechen battalions on the Ukrainian side, fighting on the most gruelling and bloody frontlines, unlike Kadyrov’s troops, who appear to have been dropped to the rear.</p> <p>The Dzhokhar Dudayev battalion is one of those fighting with Volodymyr Zelenskiy’s Ukrainian forces, as they have since Russia first invaded eastern Ukraine and illegally annexed Crimea in 2014. Named after the first post-Soviet president of independent Chechnya, known as the Republic of Ichkeria, it was created as a “peacekeeping battalion – so rest in peace, Russians,” says Tor.</p> <p>Many of their fighters are first- or second-generation Chechen émigrés who fled Kadyrov’s tyrannical rule when he emerged as Putin’s strongman out of the post-Soviet Chechen wars waged by Moscow as it sought to kill off independence.</p> <p>The Chechens say they are fighting for Ukraine as it has come to represent the best chance to free those nations under what they describe as “the Russian yoke”. Those of them who have lived in Ukraine for a while add that the country also offers them the freedom to practise their Muslim faith.</p> <p>The perception of Chechens inside Ukraine is “very bad”, says Tor, poisoned by the reputation of Kadyrov’s regime and the propaganda pumped out by Moscow, including over the supposed threat of “radical Islamism” that they are said to pose. “For more than 30 years, nonstop propaganda against us. [They say] we are barbarians, we are animals, we are predators, we cannot speak normally.”</p> <p>The battalion operates under the command of the Ukrainian army but they are not recipients of any of the defence budget. Its clubhouse, in a basement in a building in Kyiv, is littered with pickled vegetables, flak jackets, a machine gun and even a Starlink satellite dish. They are constantly seeking further donations. A</p>

sombrero hanging on a coat hook cuts an anomalous sight. “We have a Mexican donor,” says Tor. “He has been here a couple of times, he donated two cars.”

There is a further peculiarity. The battalion commander is Adam Osmaev, 41, a former pupil of Wycliffe College, a prestigious public school in the Cotswolds, and a one-time student of economics at Buckingham University.

Born in the Chechen capital, Grozny, Osmaev is the son of a high-ranking official in Chechnya’s Soviet-era oil industry. Osmaev was sent to England at the age of 13. He pulled out of university to join the fight against Russia when the Chechen war broke out in 1999.

He keeps an understandably low profile today. In October 2017, Osmaev was wounded and his wife, a sniper in the battalion, was killed when suspected Russian secret service agents opened fire on them with a Kalashnikov rifle as they returned by car to their house outside Kyiv.

“He’s very good person and he’s professional,” says Tor. “He’s really professional. A very motivated guy who is fighting for independence of Ukraine, who still has a strong belief that sooner or later Chechnya will be independent. We know he’s a very just man, calm and quiet. A real officer.”

The battalion’s track record since 24 February is certainly impressive. They ran sabotage and reconnaissance activity in the north of Kyiv in March as the Russians sought to storm Ukraine’s capital, before taking part in the liberation of the city of Izium, in the north-east of the country. “We were very proud to play a small part, give our 50 cents,” says Tor.

For the last two weeks they have been in Bakhmut, in the eastern Donetsk region. The fighting is house to house, says a staff sergeant who goes by the call sign Maga. “There are no defensive positions [for the Ukrainians] because there are these five-floor buildings and the Russians destroyed them one by one,” he adds. “They Russians have lots of heavy artillery and the Ukrainian army does not have enough to keep all these positions. Not enough mortars to keep the Russians back. The Russian tactic is to destroy everything, leave only ruins and then the infantry come. It is a tactic they used in Chechnya.”

On Sunday, Russia claimed the capture of another village in the Bakhmut area as its forces seek to encircle the city.

The frustration, the Chechens say, is that the west has not yet woken up to the need to properly arm the Ukrainians. The provision of US Himars rockets systems is said to have made the liberation of the southern Kherson region at the end of last year possible. The slow pace of the German government in its deliberations over the supply of Leopard 2 tanks is said by Tor to have been “a crime”. “Just give Ukraine the weapons and they will do the rest and save the situation without the need for you to shed your blood.”

As for fighting for a country that is not quite sure about you, Tor believes perceptions are changing. “It’s the old generation and it is the same in Chechnya, where we have people who still believe in communism, who still believe that we have to be Russian,” he says.

“We are fighting for the future and we are fighting for a free future for us and for Ukraine and for the young generation. For us, this young generation is more important than the old Soviet generation. We cannot count on the opinions of victims of Russian propaganda, and we have to say we don’t care so much.”

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HEADLINE	01/30 Russia misread Germany growing influence
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/30/europe/germany-russia-us-relations-intl-cmd/index.html
GIST	Two years ago, Moscow eyed a US-German standoff over the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline as a litmus test of transatlantic power.

Russia had invested heavily in the 750-mile undersea pipeline linking it to Germany and wanted to increase global sales and ramp up economic leverage over Europe and its [power-hungry heavy industries](#). Germany, a leading consumer, was on board from the get-go. Washington was not.

The United States didn't want the new, high-capacity subsea supply to supplant old overland lines that transited Ukraine, providing vital revenue to the increasingly Westward-leaning leadership in Kyiv.

Russia reasoned that if Washington blocked Nord Stream 2, which it ultimately did, then it would show that European power no longer flowed through Berlin, but actually via the White House.

Fast-forward two years, and reading that transatlantic dynamic post-Angela Merkel, and particularly post-Russian President Vladimir Putin's failing invasion of Ukraine, has become one of the most pressing political questions vexing the Kremlin.

Rare moment of steely leadership

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's refusal, in his words, "to be pushed" to go it alone in sending tanks to Ukraine – instead standing his ground and demanding US President Joe Biden join him in the venture, risking Putin's wrath – has shown the transatlantic power dynamic has shifted.

Europe has been slow to respond to the deep fissures in US politics and the uncertainty another Trumpian-style presidency could wreak on its allies. Decades of a reasonably unshakable reliance, if not complete trust, in the US, has been replaced by stubborn European pragmatism – and Germany leads the way.

Former Chancellor Merkel was Europe's moral compass. Scholz has found unexpected metal in his ponderous, often stop/go/wait traffic-light governing coalition and won thunderous applause in Germany's Bundestag on Wednesday as he flashed a rare moment of steely leadership.

At their summit in March last year, NATO leaders agreed to equip, arm and train Ukraine to NATO standards. It wouldn't be a member, but the message to Moscow was unequivocal: In the coming years, Ukraine would look and fight like it was in NATO.

Ukraine's ongoing metamorphosis from legacy Soviet force to NATO clone hasn't just been about the mechanics or even diplomacy of getting tanks, fighting vehicles, air defenses and artillery, it's been about bringing NATO member states' near-billion people along with their politicians. Scholz made that point in parliament on Wednesday.

"Trust us," he said, "we won't put you in danger." He spelled out how his government had already handled Russia's aggression and how fears of a freezing winter and economic collapse were not realized. "The government dealt with the crisis," he said, adding: "We are in a much better position."

The applause at each step of his carefully crafted speech spoke as loudly as his words. In short, Scholz got it right for Germany, bringing with him a population typically averse to war and projecting their own power, and deeply divided over how much they should aid Ukraine in killing Russians and potentially angering the Kremlin.

Putin cooling on escalation?

But if in Europe Scholz seems to have wrestled some vestige of influence over America in the Ukraine war, in Moscow they don't believe his new vigor changes much.

Andrey Kortunov, director general of the Russian International Affairs Council, says that in Moscow, "most people believe Biden calls the shots."

Indeed, rather than Germany having more leverage, he says, "the American leadership looks stronger than ever."

Nevertheless, Russia's diplomats have been shoveling their animus toward the West into the public arena on both sides of the Atlantic.

Russia's ambassador to Germany said Berlin's move to send tanks was "extremely dangerous" and accused Scholz of refusing "to acknowledge its [Germany's] historic accountability to our people for the horrific crimes of Nazism." Meanwhile his counterpart in Washington accused the White House of "blatant provocation" and Biden of being intent on the "strategic defeat" of Russia.

Dmitry Medvedev, former Russian president and deputy chairman of its national security council, has said Russia would never allow itself to be defeated and would use nuclear weapons if threatened.

Oddly, closer to the Kremlin, statements are less bellicose, signaling that Putin is perhaps cooling to nuclear escalation.

Responding to Biden and Scholz's decision on tanks, Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said it adds "tension to the continent, but it cannot prevent Russia from reaching our goals."

Berlin wants hands on the controls

The mixed messaging has some Muscovites CNN spoke with after the announcements by Biden and Scholz on tanks confused. Some said Russia would win regardless, and lumped the US and Germany together as the losers, but a significant proportion were worried about the war, dismayed at the heavy death toll and frustrated that Putin ignored their concerns.

How much Scholz is aware of Putin's softening popularity or whether he believes it relevant at this moment is unclear, but his actions now, sending tanks, may help ease Putin's iron grip on power.

From being late to recognize Russia's threat, reorient Germany, reinvigorate its military, and ramp up weapon supplies to Ukraine, the pragmatist Scholz has now signaled Germany is very much in play – and, indeed, wants hands on the controls. He said Germany would "coordinate" supplies of the Leopard 2 from allies to Ukraine, a power invested in him by German legislation preventing any purchaser of the country's war-fighting hardware to pass it on to a third state.

With Scholz shouldering his way to the diplomatic helm, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky may find his territorial ambitions to restore the entirety of Ukraine's sovereignty including Crimea, before peace talks with Putin, constrained. The German chancellor has been at the forefront of friendly leaders wanting a speedy end to the war and the restoration of economic stability to Europe.

Longer debates about the next military moves for Ukraine could be coming and will likely signal to Zelensky that weapons supplies will be on more of a German leash, and less unilaterally led by Washington.

This shift in the power dynamic may not change the way the war is fought but could impact the contours of a final deal and shape a lasting peace when it comes.

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HEADLINE	01/29 China Covid crisis spawn next disaster?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-chinas-covid-crisis-could-spawn-the-next-omicron-level-disaster?ref=home
GIST	China's COVID disaster is entering a critical phase. The BA.5.2 subvariant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus is spreading essentially unchecked through a population of 1.4 billion people with weak COVID immunity . And as the virus is spreading, it's mutating— <i>fast</i> . If the rest of the world's experience with the same form of COVID is any indication, one of two things will happen in China in the coming weeks and months. The virus could settle down on a genetic level and produce a succession of subvariants closely related to BA.5.2—ones that the Chinese population's slowly

increasing immunity should be able to handle. Or, the unrestrained transmission and runaway mutations will lead to [a genetic breakthrough for SARS-CoV-2](#).

In that case, we might see the first new major variant since [Omicron](#) appeared more than a year ago.

That's the worst-case scenario. "The worry is that new variants, or Omicron subvariants, will be created that are more immune-evasive and will be able to infect those outside of China who currently have some degree of protection from vaccines or previous infection," John Swartzberg, a professor emeritus of infectious diseases and vaccinology at the University of California-Berkeley's School of Public Health, told The Daily Beast.

For all the debate over shutdowns, masks and vaccines, most countries blundered into a fairly effective approach to COVID. Through 2020 and into 2021, many governments restricted—if not shut down—retail businesses, schools, crowds and travel. That helped slow the virus' spread until vaccines were available from late 2020.

Over the next two years, most of the world's eight billion people got at least one shot of some reasonably effective COVID vaccine—and billions got fully vaccinated and boosted, too. That made it safe for countries to gradually lift restrictions. Most of the world reopened.

Yes, that meant more viral spread at first. And in late 2021, that produced the Omicron variant and its many subvariants, which are still dominant today. In most countries, vaccines blunted the worst impacts of back-to-back-to-back Omicron waves. Case rates went up and down but, overall, hospitalizations and deaths trended down.

Most of the world had entered a beneficial cycle that began with mass-vaccination. The protection from vaccines gradually faded, but natural antibodies from past infection more than made up for it. People were getting infected and reinfected, but each infection refreshed the natural antibodies that usually made the next infection milder than the last.

Epidemiologists expect this cycle to continue unless—and until—the SARS-CoV-2 virus makes some huge evolutionary leap that renders all existing antibodies ineffective. "The more infections that occur, as in China, the more times the Omicron evolutionary dice are rolled and the more chances [there are] for new subvariants to arise," Eric Bortz, a University of Alaska-Anchorage virologist and public-health expert, told The Daily Beast. "It's like adding new spices into the soup."

If that evolutionary leap happens, it'll probably happen in China, the one country that locked down in early 2020 and stayed locked down for nearly three years. Only on Dec. 8, following widespread public protests in many major cities, did the ruling Chinese Communist Party finally lift major restrictions.

"The situation completely changed on Dec. 8," Ben Cowling, a professor of epidemiology at The University of Hong Kong, told The Daily Beast. The restrictions had contained COVID, resulting in what was one of the lowest overall case-rates of any country. But the lack of infections also meant a lack of natural antibodies.

Yes, around 90 percent of the Chinese population was at least partially vaccinated. But most Chinese got jabbed more than a year ago. By December, the protection from those early vaccinations had pretty much worn off.

So when restrictions were lifted and 1.4 billion Chinese finally started going out and traveling, they did so without the natural immunity that the rest of the world had earned the hard way, through past infection. It should come as no surprise that SARS-CoV-2 spread *fast* in China starting six weeks ago. "It's inevitable that the end of lockdown would lead to a large number of cases," Cindy Prins, a University of Florida epidemiologist, told The Daily Beast.

No one outside of the Chinese Communist Party knows for sure exactly how many Chinese have caught COVID in recent weeks. The paranoid, authoritarian CCP stopped sharing good data shortly after lifting restrictions. But testing of air travelers from China is fragmentary evidence of a major crisis.

The same testing, along with hundreds of viral samples that Chinese epidemiologists [have uploaded](#) to a global COVID database, tells us which forms of the virus are dominant in China. While most of the world is on the down-slope of a medium-sized winter wave caused by XBB, a “recombinant” blend of several Omicron subvariants, China’s just now catching BA.5.2, a subvariant that was dominant everywhere else around six months ago.

And those millions—or even *tens* of millions—of Chinese BA.5.2 infections have spawned a trio of BA.5.2 spinoffs. Viral samples from several Chinese cities, uploaded last week, were the first evidence of BA.5.2.48, BA.5.2.49 and BA.5.2.50. That’s right: China is now evolving its own forms of COVID.

It’s a problem for China, of course, which has weeks or months of suffering ahead of it as authorities scramble to organize fresh rounds of vaccinations. The jabs are triage—a desperate effort to prevent overfull hospitals from collapsing as the Chinese population slowly, painfully builds up its natural immunity.

Given China’s sky-high COVID infection rate, accelerating mutation is unavoidable. The most optimistic scenario would be the virus’ evolution hewing close to BA.5.2—albeit at great cost to millions of everyday Chinese. China’s domestically produced vaccines seem to work fine against Omicron and its subvariants. The natural antibodies from BA.5.2 infections should offer strong protection against BA.5.2.48, 49, 50—and even 51, 52, 53 and so on.

Subvariants might mix, like they did in much of the rest of the world. “China might even get its own version of the recombinant XBB,” Edwin Michael, an epidemiologist at the Center for Global Health Infectious Disease Research at the University of South Florida, told The Daily Beast. That subvariant is more transmissible than previous subvariants and it somewhat evades our antibodies. But it’s still a form of Omicron. It’s *manageable*.

But a major outbreak in a population of 1.4 billion increases the chance that the virus will make a big evolutionary leap. Similar to the leaps that produced the Delta variant back in late 2020 and Omicron a year later. A new variant could be even more transmissible than the Omicron subvariants—and it might *totally* evade our antibodies.

A new variant could spread from China to the rest of the world, surging across populations that have grown complacent against COVID because they’ve only been dealing with Omicron and its subvariants for more than a year now.

Remember early 2020, when we had neither effective vaccines nor natural antibodies and no way to slow viral transmission except to mask up and stay home? That’s the worst-case scenario, for the whole world, if China’s accelerating BA.5.2 outbreak reaches genetic escape-velocity, so to speak, and evolves a brand-new variant.

A dangerous new variant isn’t likely, Prins stressed. The U.S. got through its worst Omicron wave without producing a new variant. So did Europe and Asia outside of China. “It’s possible that after this first post-Zero-COVID wave subsides and immunity from it wanes that we could see new variants arise,” Prins said, “but I don’t think that is any more likely to happen in China than [it was] in other countries.”

But it’s possible. And it’s a little *more* possible with each passing day until China’s wave of infections crests. Stay alert. Get boosted. [The pandemic isn’t over.](#)

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HEADLINE	01/29 Report: police training within US falls short
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/police-training-us-falls-short-compared-rest-world/story?id=96729748

George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Philando Castile, Laquan McDonald, and now Tyre Nichols -- all are part a growing list of people who have been [killed by police](#).

The latest disturbing death of Nichols at the hands of [Memphis police officers](#) has renewed calls for police reform.

"The world is watching us," Shelby County District Attorney Steve Mulroy said Thursday as he [announced charges](#) against the five police officers who allegedly beat Nichols to death earlier this month. "We need to show the world what lessons we can learn from this tragedy."

But rather than looking inward, some experts say U.S. law enforcement officials may be better served by looking at the rest of the world for its lessons.

A recent report by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), an independent research organization that focuses on critical issues in policing, shows significant gaps in how police in the U.S. are trained when compared to their international counterparts.

According to the report, titled "Transforming Police Recruit Training: 40 Guiding Principles," training standards for the more than 18,000 police agencies in the U.S. are outdated and inconsistent, and often provide training that is too brief -- with an emphasis on weapons and tactics and too little focus on decision-making, communications and other critical thinking skills that officers use every day.

"Almost every major aspect of policing has fundamentally changed in recent decades, except for one: how we train officers," the report states.

A matter of weeks

Police training in the U.S. is most often measured in weeks, while in many other countries it is measured in months or years.

"Our training is outdated, antiquated, and is trying to do on the cheap what other places have done in a comprehensive way," PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler told ABC News.

A 2018 Justice Department study of state and local law enforcement training academies found that the average length of core basic police training in the U.S. is 833 hours, or less than 22 weeks. A more recent survey by PERF found a similar result, with responding agencies reporting an average of 20 weeks of basic police training.

In comparison, police recruits in Japan get between 15 and 21 months of training. Police in Germany get 2.5 years of training. And in Finland, police education takes three years to complete.

U.S. law enforcement agencies do often provide additional training for police on the job who serve in specialized police units such as narcotics squads and violent crime suppression teams. But in Memphis, it was one of those special units -- Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace in Our Neighborhood, or SCORPION -- whose members are accused of fatally beating Nichols during a traffic stop arrest. The unit has [now been deactivated](#) following Nichols' death.

Like the military

Many police academies in the U.S. still resemble military boot camps, with cadets in buzz cuts and hair buns getting yelled at by drill instructors.

"Barking orders and giving commands and sort of a military kind of thinking -- it's not a problem-solving approach. It's not critical thinking," Wexler said.

Much of the training in American police academies emphasizes skills like marksmanship and defensive tactics, with less focus on so-called "soft skills" like communication and crisis intervention.

"People call those soft skills -- those are not soft skills, those are hard," Wexler says. "Communicating, being a good listener, responding, thinking, and sometimes saying, 'You know what, we need to step back, we're not the right ones here. For this we need to bring someone else in.' Those are important skills, to know your limitations, and also to ask the right questions."

De-escalation training

A 2020 study by the University of Cincinnati looked at the impact of a training program focused on de-escalation and critical thinking skills in the Louisville Metro Police Department in Kentucky. The program, called Integrated Communications, Assessment and Tactics (ICAT) was developed by PERF. University of Cincinnati researchers found that ICAT training was associated with a sizeable reduction in use-of-force incidents as well as the number of injuries to both citizens and officers.

LMPD officers who had participated in ICAT training experienced a 28% reduction in use-of-force incidents and 36% fewer injuries, compared to their peers who had not been given the training. In addition, 26% fewer citizens were injured in encounters with officers who had the training compared to officers who did not.

"It turns out that actually using a critical decision model ... is not only safer for the person you're dealing with, but it's actually safer for police officers," said Wexler.

The cost of reform

Regardless of their training, police in the U.S. face unique challenges compared to many of their international counterparts, experts say. American streets are awash in guns and illicit drugs like fentanyl, and training alone won't change that.

Meanwhile, police departments across the country continue to struggle with staffing shortages. Qualified new recruits are in short supply, and many departments are not keeping pace with the number of police retiring or leaving the profession.

Expanding police training is costly and could have the undesirable effect of slowing down the pipeline of new officers at a time when law enforcement agencies can't get new police online fast enough. According to a 2020 PERF survey, 71% of police agencies spend less than 5% of their budgets on recruit training.

And law enforcement remains a dangerous profession, with difficult hours and limited pay.

As a result, Wexler says that improving policing requires a wide-ranging investment in the profession.

"There has to be a national commitment to want to fundamentally train ... and to compensate police at a level that makes them professionals," he said.

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HEADLINE	01/29 Canada border 743% spike illegal crossings
SOURCE	https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11688597/Now-theyre-coming-CANADA-Northern-border-sees-743-spike-migrants-trying-cross-US.html
GIST	<p>Border Patrol working in the north of the US have reported a 743 percent rise in migrant encounters compared to the same period a year ago.</p> <p>Robert Garcia, the chief patrol agent for the Swanton Sector - which covers Vermont, New York and New Hampshire - said he was troubled by the increasing popularity of the people-smuggling route.</p> <p>He warned traffickers are exploiting desperate asylum seekers with potentially lethal consequences, amid freezing temperatures and dangerous passages.</p> <p>Meanwhile the Grand Forks sector, which covers Minnesota and North Dakota, has reported 90 apprehensions in the three months since October 1.</p>

The figure is more than for the whole of the 2022 fiscal year, when 80 were apprehended between September 30, 2021 and October 1, 2022.

It comes as a surprise as officials focus on clogging the southern border, which has reached crisis point as [thousands migrants seek entry from Mexico](#).

The deadly consequences were laid bear a year ago when an Indian family of four was found dead just north of the Grand Forks sector.

At the beginning of January, a Haitian man, Fritznel Richard, died just north of the Swanton Sector, having frozen to death while trying to reach his wife in the US.

'Swanton Sector's greatest concern in carrying out our mission of border security is the preservation of life - the lives of community residents we are sworn to protect, the lives of our Border Patrol Agents carrying out the mission day-in and day-out in the field, and the lives of the individuals, families, and children we are charged with apprehending as they attempt to circumvent legal processes for entry,' said Garcia.

'Unfortunately, the transnational criminal organizations that stand to profit from the increased flow of human traffic care only about profits and have no concern for the welfare of those whose plight they seek to exploit for financial gain.'

Border Patrol said the number of migrants encountered in the sector during the 2023 fiscal year - which began in October - had already surpassed the 12 months of 2022's fiscal year. In December, a record 441 people were apprehended in the sector.

The latest data 'represent a sustained increase in illegal border crossings as we head into the harshest winter months,' they said.

Overnight temperatures in the zone regularly drop to 12F, and have dropped below zero in previously years.

'Unpredictable storm fronts bring ice and significant snow accumulation throughout the extended winter season,' the Border Patrol warned.

'These geographic and weather features can make traversing unfamiliar territory perilous.

'Additionally, the risk of hypothermia from sustained or even brief outdoor exposure to near-freezing temperatures in wet or windy conditions is significant.'

Garcia tweeted: 'In less than four months, Swanton Sector's apprehensions have surpassed the COMBINED two prior years (FY2021-2022).

'In the face of this adversity, our #BorderPatrol Agents remain steadfast in their portrayal of our ideals: Vigilance, Integrity, & Service to Country. #HonorFirst.'

Kathryn Siemer, acting patrol agent in charge of the station in Pembina, North Dakota - one of seven stations in the Grand Forks sector - said the sharp spike in encounters was due in part to Canada loosening its COVID restrictions.

Migrants have been able to make their way to Canada, and, if unsatisfied by their life there, try their luck in the US.

Another factor driving the increase is Canada placing increasing barriers on migrants, said Frantz André, an immigration consultant who runs an organization that helps asylum seekers.

He told CBC migrants believe they may have better chances of working without papers in the US.

Siemer told Global News she remained haunted by the thought of the Indian family of four, who died north of her sector last year.

The parents and two children trudged through waist-deep snow in a blizzard for 11 hours before they perished.

Jagdish Patel, 39 and Vaishailben Patel, 37 were found dead with their children Vihangi, 11 and Dharmik, three, in a field north of the US border on January 19, 2022, as temperatures plummeted to as low as -40F.

Steve Shand, 57, from Deltona, Florida has been charged with human smuggling and an investigation into the family's deaths continues.

The family, originally from Gujarat, is believed to have made their way into Manitoba province from Toronto, where they initially entered Canada on January 12, 2022.

On the southern border, meanwhile, the border city of Yuma, [Arizona](#), says it is at breaking point - with the unprecedented flow of migrants leaving the community at the brink of collapse and hospitals and food banks overloaded.

Yuma County Supervisor Jonathan Lines criticized the [Biden administration for its handling of the border crisis](#) and said his county will crumble as it [can't support the arrival of more migrants](#).

Customs and Border officials say some five million migrants have crossed over the U.S. southern border since January 2021 when the Biden administration took over.

After [Yuma County's Border Patrol saw a 171 percent increase in migrant crossings between 2021 and 2022](#), Lines warned that the situation will only get worse.

'Policies need to be changed when you see an unprecedented amount of people coming across the border that even supersedes what we saw under any of the other presidents for the past 30 years,' he told Fox News.

He called the surging increase in crossings 'ridiculous'.

'They're coming because they said that Biden told them to come, that we have an open border.'

Yuma is known as the 'sunniest city on Earth', but over recent years it has become known as the US hotspot for migrant crossings that has stretched its Border Control to the limit.

Facilities along the border are being pushed to breaking point due to the increasing migrant flow, with residents reportedly unable to access the only hospital in the city.

Migrants are coming from Central America in hope of a better life for them and their families, but locals and critics of the current immigration policy view the current numbers as unsustainable.

Most of the migrants are drawn to the area by the relative ease of crossing the border, officials say.

According to Yuma Mayor Douglas Nicholls, there are 50 breaks in the border wall along the 126-mile Yuma sector, including the infamous 'Gap'.

Huge container-sized gaps in the 30ft border wall allow migrants to walk right through, aided by a thinly-spread Border Patrol.

Construction is currently underway to fill some of the gaps.

To add to the surge, [Fox News reported](#) that their sources confirmed 1.2million illegal migrants had escaped the Border Patrol force since January 2021.

Border counties like Yuma are trying to balance the needs of residents with the migrants queueing

A strain has also been put on the city when it comes to food, with migrants walking across crop fields risking a pillar of the community's local economy.

Yuma is the winter lettuce capital of the US due to its famed all-year-round sun. It produces 93 percent of the country's lettuce during the winter months.

Local farmer Alex Muller told Fox News: 'Our fields are monitored and audited and tested for different pathogens. You can't have people walking through the field.'

County Supervisor Lines called on the Biden administration to act to relieve the pressure on border counties, and to visit Yuma to witness the strain that has been placed on the community.

'Please come and see for yourself,' Lines said. 'I've invited them several times, and I would invite them again right now,' he added.

A bipartisan delegate from Washington DC, led by Senators Kyrsten Sinema and John Cornyn visited Yuma earlier this month. But officials complained that they saw a 'sanitized' version of the border crisis.

The number of people in Latin America and the Caribbean who wish to migrate has jumped this past decade to 242 million, many eyeing the US, heightening [fears about the border crisis](#).

In 2011, only 18 percent of people in Latin America and the Caribbean wanted to permanently leave their homes. By 2021, that had risen to 37 percent of the region's 655 million people, [Gallup polling shows](#).

The desire to migrate rose faster in South America than anywhere else in the world. By the end of 2021, the share of Latinos wishing to migrate was on par with those in poverty-wracked sub-Saharan Africa.

In some South American nations — Honduras, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic — as much as half of the total population expressed a desire to move and live abroad permanently.

The survey comes amid record numbers of migrants trying to enter the US irregularly from Mexico, with Republicans criticizing President Joe Biden, a Democrat, over what they call his 'loose' or 'open' border.

Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a right-leaning advocacy group, said the survey revealed 'enormous pent-up demand' to migrate north to the US.

'We can see how President Biden has created a dangerous and volatile situation as every month, millions more formulate the intentions and plans to try to move,' Stein told DailyMail.com.

Migrants come from South America and the Caribbean in search of a better life for them and their families. Many are fleeing corrupt and inept leftist governments in such nations as Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua.

But border locals and critics of the immigration policy view the current numbers as unsustainable and balk at the prospect of hundreds of millions more also laying plans to head north.

Globally, the desire to migrate has reached 'decade-high levels' in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and other regions, said Gallup, which polled 127,000 people aged 15 and older across 122 countries last year.

Still, not everyone with a desire to migrate is able to do so, researchers added.

The US remains the favored destination for the world's migrants, though the share eyeing America has dropped slightly to 18 percent this past decade. Canada, Germany, Spain and France round out the top five destinations.

In previous surveys, Gallup has found that America was the favored end point for more than a third of Latin America and the Caribbean's would-be migrants.

The survey was released on Tuesday amid a surge of Cubans and Haitians traversing the Caribbean by boat to reach Florida's shores, and record flows of people trying to cross the southwestern border.

The border city of Yuma, Arizona, is at breaking point with the unprecedented flow of migrants leaving the community at the brink of collapse and hospitals and food banks overloaded, local officials say.

Yuma County Supervisor Jonathan Lines has slammed the Biden administration for its handling of the border crisis and said his county will crumble as it can't support the cascading flow of migrants.

Customs and Border officials say there were 251,487 migrant encounters at the border in December. That's the highest figure for a single month ever, and brings the latest three-month total up to 717,600.

Last month saw a surge in unauthorized immigration due to uncertainty over Title 42, a Trump-era policy that has expelled migrants at the border since the start of the pandemic.

Some 5 million migrants have crossed over the US southern border since January 2021 when the Biden administration took over the White House, according to the agency.

The Biden administration has launched new schemes to allow more Latinos into the US legally and advised unauthorized migrants to stay at home, but Republicans still blame him for unruly scenes at the US-Mexico frontier.

Stein said Biden's plan to 'parole in more people' was no solution.

'That merely incentivizes more to come until conditions in the US replicate those of the sending nations,' he told DailyMail.com.

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HEADLINE	01/29 China top weapons lab uses US chips
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-top-nuclear-weapons-lab-used-american-computer-chips-decades-after-ban-11674990320
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE—China's top nuclear-weapons research institute has bought sophisticated U.S. computer chips at least a dozen times in the past two and half years, circumventing decades-old American export restrictions meant to curb such sales.</p> <p>A Wall Street Journal review of procurement documents found that the state-run China Academy of Engineering Physics has managed to obtain the semiconductors made by U.S. companies such as Intel Corp. and Nvidia Corp. since 2020 despite its placement on a U.S. export blacklist in 1997.</p> <p>The chips, which are widely used in data centers and personal computers, were acquired from resellers in China. Some were procured as components for computing systems, with many bought by the institute's</p>

laboratory studying computational fluid dynamics, a broad scientific field that includes the modeling of nuclear explosions.

Such purchases defy longstanding restrictions imposed by the U.S. that aim to prevent the use of any U.S. products for atomic-weapons research by foreign powers. The academy, known as CAEP, was one of the first Chinese institutions put on the U.S. blacklist, known as the entity list, because of its nuclear work.

A Journal review of research papers published by CAEP found that at least 34 over the past decade referenced using American semiconductors in the research. They were used in a range of ways, including analyzing data and generating algorithms. Nuclear experts said that in at least seven of them, the research can have applications to maintaining nuclear stockpiles. CAEP didn't respond to requests for comment.

The findings underline the challenge facing the Biden administration as it seeks to more aggressively counter the use of American technology by China's military. In October, the U.S. [expanded the scope of export regulations](#) to [prevent China from obtaining the most advanced American chips](#) and chip-manufacturing tools that power artificial intelligence and supercomputers, which are increasingly important to modern warfare.

Most of the chips procured by the academy ranged in size from 7 nanometers to 14 nanometers, many of which are difficult for China to mass produce. They are widely available on the open market: Versions of Intel's Xeon Gold and Nvidia's GeForce RTX chips purchased by CAEP can be bought off Taobao, one of China's largest e-commerce marketplaces. The purchases didn't include the latest generation of chips launched within the last two years.

Nvidia said that the semiconductors used in CAEP's research were general-purpose graphics chips used in consumer products such as personal computers. With millions of PCs sold worldwide, the U.S. chip maker said no company can monitor or control where every PC ends up. Intel said [it complies with export regulations and sanctions](#) and so must its distributors and customers.

"It's insanely difficult to enforce" the U.S. restrictions when it comes to transactions overseas, said Kevin Wolf, a former top Commerce Department official who is now an international trade lawyer. Purchases in China accounted for more than a third of the world's \$556 billion in chip sales in 2021, according to the Semiconductor Industry Association.

Founded in the late 1950s, CAEP is based in China's western Sichuan province and employs some of the country's best nuclear-weapons researchers. Physicists there helped develop the country's first hydrogen bomb. It conducts research into computer science, electrical engineering and other fields.

Commerce Department officials in June 2020 expanded restrictions on CAEP by adding 10 entities owned or operated by the academy as well as 17 aliases it uses to [the entity list for procuring U.S.-origin items](#) in support of Chinese nuclear-weapon activities.

China has been [accelerating the expansion of its nuclear force](#) and delivery capabilities in recent years, the Department of Defense said in an annual report to Congress released in November. The People's Liberation Army could stockpile about 1,500 nuclear warheads by 2035 if it continues at its current pace, up from more than 400 now, the department estimated.

The U.S.'s Bureau of Industry and Security, which regulates the sale of sensitive and dual-use technologies, said U.S. and foreign parties are responsible for conducting the due diligence to prevent commodities, software and technology from getting to listed entities.

"As mass-market products move through multiple parties in global supply chains, full visibility on ultimate end users is a large undertaking," the Commerce Department agency said, adding that it would vigorously enforce the new rules introduced in October.

China's military and its suppliers can circumvent end-user restrictions by using shell companies and other export-control evasion tactics, said Gregory Allen, a former U.S. Defense Department official who is now a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

A large number of U.S.-designed chips are manufactured overseas, which can place them outside Washington's export-control rules. In November, Nvidia started marketing a replacement for its A100 chip with a narrower bandwidth to send and receive data [so that it can be sold in China](#) under U.S. export restrictions.

Procurement tenders from CAEP include one in November 2020 that sought computing systems with 60 Intel processors and 49 Nvidia chips, including four of Nvidia's high-end V100 graphics processing units that speed up analysis of large volumes of data.

Beyond chips, the state-run academy in September called for bidders to service its printed circuit boards, which hold chips and other electronic components together, that were designed by U.S. firm [Cadence Design Systems](#), Inc. CAEP also sought to purchase integrated circuits from other American chip makers. Cadence said it follows all U.S. export control regulations, including those regarding entity-list companies.

CAEP's tenders were mostly fulfilled by small Chinese companies for uses including supercomputing, official documents show.

Six of the seven CAEP research papers reviewed by the Journal that were relevant to nuclear stockpile maintenance, including one published as recently as August, related to inertial confinement fusion, or ICF, which involves the use of high-powered lasers to generate fusion reactions similar to those occurring on a large scale in thermonuclear weapons.

In the six papers, scientists at CAEP described the use of graphics processors and other chips to improve the functioning of ICF devices. One paper, co-written by authors from CAEP and published in March, described using an Intel Core i7-7800X processor and an Nvidia GeForce GTX 1080 Ti graphics card. The seventh described the use of similar chips in research with applications in fluid dynamics and explosion mechanics.

ICF is used by the U.S. and other nations to refine computer codes used to maintain nuclear stockpiles in the absence of [nuclear testing](#) under longstanding agreements by countries including China, said Frank von Hippel, a nuclear physicist at Princeton University, who reviewed the papers.

Ian Stewart, executive director of the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Washington, D.C., who also reviewed the papers, said a primary driver for ICF work is the insights it provides to nuclear weapons.

For U.S. export policies to be effective, there is a "need to control this tech by not allowing it to be sold by distributors when the end user is unknown," said Mr. Stewart.

In December, the Energy Department announced [a breakthrough in fusion-energy research](#) using ICF technology at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Livermore, Calif.

Separately, in 2017, researchers at an affiliate of CAEP, the Beijing-based Institute of Applied Physics and Computational Mathematics, wrote about the key role Intel chips had played in China's Tianhe-2 supercomputer and nuclear reactor analysis.

The Tianhe-2 was used by researchers in China to conduct calculations in nuclear explosive activities, according to the Bureau of Industry and Security. The Chinese institute conducts research into nuclear-warhead design computations, according to the Federation of American Scientists, a nonprofit think tank.

HEADLINE	01/29 Growing concern: time on Russia side
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/some-western-backers-of-ukraine-worry-that-time-might-be-on-russias-side-11674969063
GIST	<p>Behind the decision to sharply step up Western military aid to Ukraine lies a worry in some Western capitals that time might be on Russia's side.</p> <p>That concern suggests the window for Ukraine isn't indefinite and it needs powerful Western weapons—main battle tanks, other armored vehicles and more air-defense systems—soon to reinforce the momentum it achieved in offensive successes around Kyiv, Kharkiv and Kherson last year.</p> <p>That is a contrast with the sentiment widespread last spring when Russian troops were on the retreat from Kyiv. With Russian President Vladimir Putin's initial war plan in disarray, Western governments at the time were hopeful that the longer the fighting went on, the more likely Ukraine would prevail.</p> <p>Western officials said that if Europe and Washington kept their nerve and emerged united after a difficult winter, Russia's economic problems and military failures, deepened by sanctions, could force Moscow to seek an off-ramp in the conflict or sue for peace.</p> <p>As Russia's invasion of Ukraine approaches its first anniversary, that confidence has faded. Instead, officials in some capitals now fear the Kremlin, which is willing to keep throwing men and materiel into the war, could gain the upper hand in any lengthy war of attrition.</p> <p>Better, then, to give Ukraine more advanced weapons that could help it change the war's dynamic and overwhelm Russia's ability to fight.</p> <p>Russia's military has taken heavy losses of some of its best men and equipment and there are signs that it is running short of important military capabilities, including some precision missiles.</p> <p>Some of the toughest Western sanctions—such as the oil embargo and price cap on Russian crude-oil exports—are also only now starting to take effect. Russia's economy is predicted to suffer a significant recession this year, and its potential is likely to remain diminished for years to come.</p> <p>However, there is little sign of the sanctions grinding Russia's military to a halt or putting so much economic pressure on the Kremlin, always adept at crushing dissent and protest, that it saps domestic support for the war.</p> <p>Instead, Russia is looking to launch a new offensive in coming months, with better-trained conscripts filling out the ranks, ready for the kind of grinding battles that appear to have yielded gains for Moscow recently in the fighting around the eastern city of Bakhmut.</p> <p>The shift in Western thinking over the need to accelerate supplies to Ukraine has played out publicly in recent days in the decisions by the U.S., the U.K. and Germany to send Western-designed main battle tanks to Ukraine.</p> <p>With other armored vehicles and air-defense systems, the weapons are designed to help Ukraine not only repel any Russian offensive but to provide the wherewithal for Kyiv to make further inroads into Russian-held territory, putting it in a better position from which to negotiate.</p> <p>British officials have been the clearest in publicly arguing that the threat posed by Russia could increase as time goes by and that there is urgency to supply Ukraine with the kind of equipment that can help it advance.</p> <p>“We have a window to accelerate efforts to secure a lasting peace for Ukrainians,” U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Twitter on Wednesday in welcoming the German and U.S. announcement they would supply Ukraine with heavy tanks. “Let's keep it up.”</p>

There is another factor in moving soon. For now, officials say public opinion in Europe and the U.S. remains steadfast in supporting military and financial aid. But Mr. Putin may hope such support wouldn't be sustained over years of war and changes of administration in the U.S. and elsewhere.

The turnaround in thinking about the need to accelerate deliveries of heavy weapons and high-caliber arms to Ukraine has been a sharp one. A few months ago, as Ukraine launched a successful counteroffensive that won back swaths of Russian-occupied territory, there was confidence among Western officials that Kyiv was getting what it needed to make further progress and ward off Russian advances. Multiple Russian military missteps played into that.

Even then, some governments were urging Western allies to scale up support for Ukraine to prevent the conflict from dragging on for years.

"Our calculations were based on the fact that Russia still is an enormous country and with much bigger resources when it comes to soldiers and ability to produce weaponry which does not require Western components," said Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis, one of the earliest proponents of stepping up Western deliveries. "The longer we give them, the more people...they can throw at the Ukrainians."

Some Western allies remain cautious about an acceleration of Western support.

Even as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Wednesday that Germany would send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, he pointed to the biggest concern among Kyiv's allies about sending more advanced deliveries.

"We must always make very clear that we will do what is necessary and possible to support Ukraine, but at the same time prevent an escalation of the war to a war between Russia and NATO," the chancellor told lawmakers.

There are also concerns among some officials about whether the central goal articulated by proponents of stepped-up military support—achieving a quicker end to the conflict—is realistic.

While Ukraine's military has far exceeded expectations of how quickly it can learn to operate and integrate complex Western military equipment, there is no certainty that Ukraine can again launch the kind of successful offensives it achieved last fall.

Nor is there much trust in any Western capital that Mr. Putin would ever entertain the prospect of an end to the conflict without the subjugation of Ukraine.

Anna Wieslander, director for Northern Europe at the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank, said she is skeptical that Western allies have settled on a clear strategy of scaling up weapons deliveries to help Ukraine achieve a clear set of war aims. "This is a very transformative period in the conflict. But to me, the reactions from Western capitals have been merely tactical so far," she said. "We lack a common vision about how the war should end and how these deliveries fit into that vision."

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HEADLINE	01/29 Russia flags fly in Burkina Faso
SOURCE	https://www.trtworld.com/africa/russian-flags-fly-as-thousands-rally-against-france-in-burkina-faso-64969
GIST	<p>Thousands of demonstrators have rallied in Burkina Faso's capital Ouagadougou in support of the ruling junta, days after France confirmed its troops in the landlocked African country would withdraw.</p> <p>Packing Nation Square in central Ouagadougou, protesters on Saturday held signs bearing slogans including "Down with imperialism", "Down with French policy in Africa" and "Forwards for Burkina's sovereignty".</p>

"We do not want any more foreign military bases on our soil," Lazare Yameogo, spokesperson for the Inter-African Revolutionary Movement told the crowd. "We want respect and a win-win cooperation.

"We will remain on the lookout until Burkina Faso is liberated from Western imperialism," he added.

Former colonial power France has special forces based in Ouagadougou, but its presence has come under intense scrutiny as anti-French sentiment in the region grows.

Paris confirmed this week that the troops, deployed to help fight a years-long militant insurgency, would leave within a month.

It was anger within the military at the government's failure to stem a militant insurgency that has raged since 2015 that fuelled two coups in Burkina Faso last year.

Violence by insurgents linked to Al Qaeda and Daesh has killed thousands of people and forced around two million more to flee their homes.

Liberation from yolks of Francafrique

Some commentators say the Burkinabe government's request for France to withdraw its troops is reminiscent of the ideals of former president, left-wing anti-colonial hero Thomas Sankara.

A coalition of organisations supporting Sankara's ideas welcomed "the complete liberation of our country from the yolks of Francafrique, imperialism and deadly capitalism", using a term to describe French influence in its former African colonies.

Mahamadou Sawadogo, leader of the Burkina-Russia association, said during Saturday's protest that there were "other opportunities for cooperation" in the fight against militants, notably from Moscow.

Some protesters on Saturday held Russian flags and giant posters of the leaders of Mali and Guinea, West African neighbours which like Burkina Faso are ruled by military juntas following coups.

Other signs denounced the "diktat" of French President Emmanuel Macron.

Turning to Russia

Monique Yeli Kam, a former presidential candidate and a major figure in the anti-France movement, told the AFP news agency turning towards Moscow and the Russian paramilitary group Wagner was "also a form of sovereignty".

"The old powers tend to treat us like children by saying we don't know how to choose," but Burkina was now independent and able to act freely "according to our interests", she said.

Turning away from France in favour of Russia in the anti-militant fight has not convinced all Burkinabe citizens.

"We demanded the French soldiers' departure. Now that it's done, we must not let in other imperialists," said Ibrahim Sanou, a 28-year-old shop worker.

"It's up to us to take full responsibility because the fight for true independence in Burkina Faso begins now."

Civil servant Desire Sanou added: "We must be ready to hold out to free the country from these hordes of terrorists. We don't even need Wagner or other forces."

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HEADLINE	01/29 'Cop City' protesters decry killing of activist
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/protesters-cop-city-activists-killing-doesnt-make-sense/

ATLANTA (AP) — Tortuguita's cautious voice rang out from a platform amid the tall pines the first time Vienna met them: "Who goes there?" she remembers them calling.

The tree-dweller, who chose the moniker Tortuguita – Spanish for "Little Turtle" – over their given name, was perched above the forest floor in the woods just outside Atlanta last summer.

Vienna quickly identified herself, and Tortuguita's watchfulness melted into the bubbly, curious, funny persona so many in the forest knew. They welcomed the newcomer and helped her settle in alongside the other self-proclaimed "forest defenders" on an 85-acre (34-hectare) site officials plan to develop into a huge police and firefighter training center. Protesters derisively call it "Cop City."

"It was a magical experience for me, being able to live out our ideals," Vienna told The Associated Press, recalling how the protesters shared clothing, food and money, all while engaging in community activism. She and Tortuguita quickly fell in love during those warm, late summer days.

That was before. Before a Jan. 18 police operation that ended in gunfire, leaving 26-year-old Tortuguita dead and a state trooper hospitalized, shot in the abdomen. Officials have said officers fired in self-defense after Tortuguita, whose given name was Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, shot the trooper. Activists argue it was state-sanctioned murder.

Outrage over the events has galvanized leftists around the world, with vigils from Seattle to Chicago to London to Lützerath, Germany.

Environmentalists for years had urged officials to turn the land into park space, arguing that the tall, straight pines and oaks were vital to preserving Atlanta's tree canopy and minimizing flooding.

Vienna, 25, recalls her first four months there as joy-filled. There were campfires and sleepovers, in her tent or Tortuguita's, nestled in the large wooded tract that activists call the Weelaunee Forest, the Muscogee (Creek) name for the land.

City Council approved the \$90 million Atlanta Public Safety Training Center in 2021, saying a state-of-the-art campus would replace substandard offerings and boost police morale beset by hiring and retention struggles in the wake of violent protests against racial injustice that roiled the city after George Floyd's death in 2020.

The planned development, largely financed by private corporate donations, enraged activists. Trees would be razed to build a shooting range, a "mock village" to rehearse raids and a driving course to practice chases. All would be within earshot of a poor, majority-Black neighborhood in a city with one of the nation's highest degrees of wealth inequality.

Like many of those who took to living in the forest to oppose the development, Tortuguita was an eco-anarchist committed to fighting climate change and halting expansion of a police state, Vienna said.

Beyond the distrust many in the "Stop Cop City" movement have toward police, six people who knew Tortuguita told the AP that authorities' allegations about the protester's final encounter do not match up with the person they knew: someone who, almost to a fault, always put others first.

"They were genuinely so generous and loving and always wanted to take care of people," Vienna said of her partner, who last year took a 20-hour course to become a medic for the activists. "Their biggest thing was building communities of care."

Tortuguita's brother, Daniel Esteban Paez, said his sibling was even growing long hair to donate to children with cancer.

Tortuguita was a "citizen of Earth," Paez said, growing up in their home country of Venezuela as well as Aruba, London, Russia, Egypt, Panama and the U.S. as their stepfather's oil industry career led the family

around the world. Tortuguita graduated magna cum laude from Florida State University and had been active in Food Not Bombs, helping feed homeless people in Tallahassee, Florida.

They had lived for several months among the “Stop Cop City” campers, a group whose reputation had been growing among leftist activists.

The campers built platforms in the trees and slept out, seeking public support and to block construction. They barricaded forest entrances and have been accused of threatening contractors and vandalizing heavy equipment.

Officials recently ratcheted up pressure. In December, authorities said firefighters and police officers were removing barricades to the site when they were attacked with rocks and incendiary devices. Vienna was among six arrested and accused of domestic terrorism for allegedly throwing rocks at fire department and emergency services workers, as well as a moving police vehicle. She’s fighting the charges in court.

The allegations are designed to scare others away from the cause, argued Marlon Kautz of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, a group providing legal aid to those arrested.

“These charges are purely being brought for the sake of putting activists in jail ... and demonizing the movement in the public eye,” Kautz said. “When we see the authorities using the criminal justice system to chill speech and prevent activists from associating with the movement, that is a grave threat to democracy.”

DeKalb County District Attorney Sherry Boston declined to comment on the specific facts of each case but said “if a person uses threats and violence in an effort to force a government entity to change a policy ... that is defined as Domestic Terrorism according to the Georgia statute.”

A month after the December altercation with police, Tortuguita was dead, killed as officers tried to clear remaining protesters from the site. Seven others were arrested on domestic terrorism charges during what authorities called a “clearing operation.”

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation has said there is no body camera or dashcam footage of the shooting, but that ballistic analysis shows the trooper was shot by a bullet from a handgun in Tortuguita’s possession.

The GBI said Tortuguita was inside a tent and did not comply with officers’ commands prior to firing at authorities. Vienna declined to comment when asked whether she knew if her partner had a gun, though the GBI says records show Tortuguita legally purchased the firearm in 2020.

Vienna and other activists have questioned the official version of events, calling the shooting a “murder,” accusing officials of an inconsistent, vague narrative and demanding an independent investigation. The GBI says it has a “track record of impartiality” when investigating officer-involved shootings.

On Saturday, violence and vandalism broke out when a masked contingent among hundreds protesting in downtown Atlanta began throwing rocks and aiming fireworks at a skyscraper housing the Atlanta Police Foundation. Activists then lit a police cruiser on fire and smashed a few more windows. No injuries were reported.

Authorities arrested six more people that night on charges including domestic terrorism, saying that “explosives” had been recovered. Police declined to elaborate when asked whether they were referring to fireworks or more dangerous incendiary devices.

“Make no mistake about it: these individuals meant harm to people,” Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens said during a news conference Saturday.

	<p>In response, GOP Gov. Brian Kemp on Thursday declared a state of emergency, giving him the option of calling in the Georgia National Guard to help “subdue riot and unlawful assembly.”</p> <p>Paez, Tortuguita’s 31-year-old brother from Texas, said his family is heartbroken.</p> <p>“Our family doesn’t want violence toward cops, but we also don’t want violence from cops,” Paez told the AP. “I’m just terrified at the thought that the tactics that were used to kill my sibling are going to be replicated at Cop City.”</p> <p>He bristles at the allegation that Tortuguita was a domestic terrorist. They were too kind. Too smart. Too caring.</p> <p>“He was a privileged person but he chose to be with the homeless, to be with the people that needed his caring,” said Tortuguita’s mother, Belkis Terán, who lives in Panama.</p> <p>For a long time, Paez said he did not care about the forest’s fate. He was far more concerned about Tortuguita’s safety.</p> <p>“I told my sibling, ‘If you were ever to die, I’m going to dump oil and hazardous materials in your stupid forest,’” Paez recalled, his voice cracking. “They called my bluff. I care about the forest now.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 OPCW: Assad behind 2018 chlorine attack
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/28/syria-opcw-report-douma-assad-air-force/8511674859929/
GIST	<p>Jan. 27 (UPI) -- The Assad regime used Chlorine as a chemical weapon on April 7, 2018, in the Damascus suburb of Douma, according to a new report from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, an international watchdog that works closely with the United Nations.</p> <p>The Incident Identification Team with the OPCW released a summary of the report Friday which concluded that "at least one helicopter of the Syrian 'Tiger Forces' Elite Unit dropped two yellow cylinders containing toxic chlorine gas on two apartment buildings in a civilian-inhabited area in Douma, killing 43 named individuals and affecting dozens more."</p> <p>The Douma Chlorine attack occurred during the final regime push to reconquer the Damascus suburb of Douma, which had expelled most government forces in 2012. By 2013, Douma and surrounding suburbs, known as Eastern Ghouta, were besieged by the Syrian regime military.</p> <p>Activists set up local councils to govern the area but were quickly targeted by emerging Islamist factions, notably the Saudi-funded Jihadist group Jaysh Al-Islam. Under Jaysh al Islam's rule activists disappeared and prisoners were forced to work in underground tunnels.</p> <p>In August 2013, hundreds of people, and by some estimations more than a thousand, were killed in a regime Sarin attack in Eastern Ghouta, The New York Times reported.</p> <p>The enclave was on the verge of being overrun by 2018, with Jaysh al Islam refusing to cede Douma in negotiations with the Syrian military.</p> <p>The report noted that the chlorine attack exerted pressure on negotiators to surrender the area.</p> <p>"According to insiders privy to the content of the negotiations and interviewed by the IIT, the pressure on the civilian population following the chemical attack, as well as the warning by pro-Government forces that the shelling would continue and intensify had the group not accepted to negotiate, played a key role in the decision by Jaysh al-Islam's leadership to eventually surrender," the report noted.</p>

Shortly after the attack, rescuers and civilians posted footage showing a number of dead bodies in an apartment building that was struck by a chlorine cylinder that perforated the building's roof, pouring high concentrations of chlorine into the structure.

The day after the attack, Jaysh al-Islam agreed to surrender the suburb, release prisoners, and be evacuated via a negotiated deal to the rebel-held province of Idlib.

The United States, France, and Britain conducted joint strikes against regime-linked targets in Syria on April 14, 2018.

The OPCW report noted that Russian forces were located at Dumayr airbase during regime preparations for the chlorine attack.

"The IIT has received credible information, corroborated through multiple sources, according to which Russian forces were co-located at Dumayr airbase alongside the Tiger Forces," the report says.

Previous reports from the OPCW on the Douma attack concluded that chlorine was used as a weapon, but were not authorized to name perpetrators.

Multiple witnesses were detained by the Russian and Syrian militaries following the attack. The OPCW IIT noted that witnesses were subjected to intimidation.

"The IIT received reliable indications from different sources that persons with knowledge of the incident (including medical personnel, nurses, and first responders) were exposed to threats, coercion, intimidation, and other forms of pressure," the report reads.

"The IIT notes that fear and pressures of this kind interfere with the flow of information to investigatory bodies such as the IIT."

The Syrian regime and their Russian allies have consistently claimed the attack was staged to trigger an intervention against Assad.

In 2019 an early draft of an OPCW report was released by Wikileaks. The report contained a preliminary toxicology report that indicated toxicologists consulted during a one-hour meeting were confused by the symptoms of victims seen in video filmed after the attack, questioning why they wouldn't flee into the street.

Additionally, the toxicologists were confused about why victims displayed signs of pulmonary edema, which can take hours to develop when a human is exposed to moderate concentrations of Chlorine.

Additionally two former OPCW investigators claimed to have different interpretations of the attack.

One of the former employees had written an unauthorized report suggesting that cylinders that were found at the scene of the crime were manually placed.

A second former employee claimed that chlorinated compounds discovered in Douma could have been naturally occurring or have come from a chlorine based household product.

Friday's report addressed these issues head-on, noting that highly chlorinated phenol, TeCP, discovered in a sample indicates the chlorine used was not part of a household compound and "further attests to the presence of chlorine gas in very high concentrations."

"The presence of TeCP clearly points to chlorine gas as being the chlorinating agent present at the scene, and in very high concentrations," the report reads.

	<p>Friday's report also addresses the confusion about why victims did not flee the building where they died during the attack, revealing that victims probably received a fatal dose of chlorine within minutes.</p> <p>The report reveals that the concentrations of chlorine initially released into the apartment building were at least 1,000 parts per million and that "in concentrations over 400 ppm, fatality occurs within minutes."</p> <p>"This is consistent with those observed in Douma on 7 April 2018," the report reads.</p> <p>Additionally, the report noted that once the building was struck, it was unlikely that victims could have survived for long.</p> <p>"The IIT notes that approximately 20 seconds after the release of chlorine, escape from the apartments on the third floor was almost certainly no longer possible and after 60 seconds, escape from the apartments on the second floor was almost certainly no longer possible either," the report reads.</p> <p>"The specialists' assessment that all exit routes on the third and second floor were no longer accessible without exposure to a high and lethal volume of chlorine gas."</p> <p>Investigators added that many of the victims could have died while trying to reach higher ground, standard procedure during a chlorine attack, because chlorine is heavier than air.</p> <p>"The IIT notes that witnesses recounted how some affected individuals, unaware that the source of the chlorine was on the roof, attempted to move away from the building's basement and to higher floors, as was the common protocol following chemical attacks," the report reads.</p> <p>The report also shared data on possible trajectories of the canisters, noting that a "missile trajectory expert consulted by the IIT simulated almost 80,000 trajectories."</p> <p>"The simulations performed by a missile trajectory expert, supported by the analysis of a terminal ballistics expert, provided the IIT with a scientifically plausible explanation for the delivery of the cylinders found," the report says.</p> <p>The OPCW IIT report noted that investigators were unable to uncover any evidence supporting a delivery method for the cylinders other than via helicopter.</p> <p>"No information obtained from other States Parties, pursuant to the requests by the IIT and the Director-General on the basis of paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention, or other sources supports the delivery of the cylinders in question by means other than helicopter," the report reads.</p> <p>The OPCW does not have any authority to punish perpetrators, it is only mandated with investigating incidents.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 NKorea denies sending weapons to Russia
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/01/29/north-korea-us-ukraine-russia-warning/2741675014698/
GIST	<p>Jan. 29 (UPI) -- North Korean officials refuted U.S. claims that the country is providing Russia with weapons and ammunition for its invasion of Ukraine, issuing an opaque warning to the United States.</p> <p>Kim Yo-jong, a member of North Korea's State of Affairs Commission and sister to Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, said the United States is crossing a "red line" by sending 31 M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, the Yonhap News Agency reported.</p> <p>Kim said the United States is attempting to fight a "proxy war" by "escalating" the war in Ukraine.</p>

	<p>The United States has maintained the position that North Korea and Iran are assisting Russia in the war. North Korea is accused of supplying munitions and heavy weaponry which is being used on the battlefield.</p> <p>On Sunday, Kwon Jong Gun, director general of the Department of U.S. Affairs of the Foreign Ministry for North Korea, stood behind the comments made by Yo-jong in a statement to the Korean Central News Agency, North Korea's state media outlet.</p> <p>"It is an absurd and sheer sophism as it is an extension of the illogical, deformed and gangster-like way of thinking of the U.S., which frequently introduces nuclear strike means into the Korean peninsula under the pretext of providing 'extended deterrence' against 'provocation' of someone," Kwon said.</p> <p>"The U.S. should be mindful that it will face a really undesirable result if it persists in spreading the self-made rumor against the DPRK," he continued.</p> <p>Kwon said the United States has also infringed on Russia's security interests by providing support to Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Mali defends Russia ties; rejects UN options
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-soviet-union-mali-government-united-states-russia-2962c28cfb2e03f21ff68559cf29b439
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Mali's foreign minister defended the military government's cooperation with Russia on Friday and rejected three options proposed by the U.N. chief to reconfigure the U.N. peacekeeping force in the west African country where Al-Qaida and Islamic State extremist groups are driving insecurity.</p> <p>Abdoulaye Diop told the U.N. Security Council that security is the country's top priority and Mali will not continue to justify its partnership with Russia, which is providing training and equipment to the military. He did not mention Russia's Wagner Group, the private military contractor with ties to the Kremlin.</p> <p>But Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' internal review released this week of the 17,500-strong U.N. mission, known as MINUSMA, noted that Mali's longstanding security partnership with France and others deteriorated over concerns about Wagner Group personnel operating in support of the Malian armed forces, which he said Russian officials have publicly acknowledged.</p> <p>U.S. deputy ambassador Richard Mills said the United States welcomes the U.N.'s acknowledgement in the internal review of the Wagner Group's presence in Mali.</p> <p>He called Wagner "a criminal organization that is committing widespread atrocities and human rights abuses in Mali and elsewhere." The U.S. has slapped several waves of sanctions on Wagner and its owner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, a rogue millionaire with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>Last year, France pulled its troops out of Mali, where they had been helping drive Islamic extremists from the country for nine years, following tensions with the ruling junta and the arrival of Wagner mercenaries.</p> <p>"Their presence is equated to regular abuse against Malian civilians and increasing obstruction of MINUSMA," France's deputy U.N. ambassador Nathalie Broadhurst told the Security Council on Friday. "This is not acceptable."</p> <p>Mali has struggled to contain an Islamic extremist insurgency since 2012. Extremist rebels were forced from power in Mali's northern cities with the help of a French-led military operation, but they regrouped in the desert and began launching attacks on the Malian army and its allies. Insecurity has worsened with attacks on civilians and U.N. peacekeepers in central Mali as well.</p>

In August 2020, Mali's president was overthrown in a coup that included Assimi Goita, then an army colonel. In June 2021, Goita was sworn in as president of a transitional government after carrying out his second coup in nine months.

Foreign minister Diop told the council that Goita is "resolutely committed" to holding a referendum on a draft constitution in March, electing deputies to the National Assembly in October and November, and holding presidential elections in February 2024.

He said the government remains committed to defending its territory, protecting its people and implementing a 2015 peace agreement.

The peace agreement was signed by three parties — the government, a coalition of groups called the Coordination of Movements of Azawad that includes ethnic Arabs and Tuaregs who seek autonomy in northern Mali, and a pro-government militia known as the Platform — but the movements suspended participation in December.

Diop called their decision "regrettable" but said "we hope soon to reach a common understanding with our brothers from the signatory movements."

Secretary-General Guterres' internal review of MINUSMA called Mali "one of the most difficult operating environments for peacekeeping," citing significant air and ground restrictions imposed by Malian security authorities. The restrictions have exposed peacekeeping personnel "to security risks in an already dangerous environment in which 165 peacekeepers have been killed and 687 injured by hostile action since July 2013," he said.

The secretary-general said the mission's operations will come under additional pressure because four countries that have contributed troops are pulling them out, which will mean a loss of over 2,250 troops.

Guterres said MINUSMA's ability to deliver on its mandate — protecting civilians, supporting improvement of the security and political situation and monitoring human rights — will hinge on advances in the political transition, progress in implementing the peace agreement and freedom of movement for peacekeeper and their intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets.

The secretary-general said expansion of MINUSMA's mandate in 2019 without additional manpower overstretched the mission and "the current situation is unsustainable."

He proposed three options: increasing the force by either 3,680 or 2,000 uniformed personnel; reconfiguring the force to support its existing priorities or to focus primarily on supporting the peace agreement; or ending the peacekeeping mission and transforming it into a political mission.

Mali's Diop said the U.N. chief's proposals don't meet Mali's aspirations for a more robust security operation which would include engaging in offensive actions and patrols, especially as part of its mandate to protect civilians.

On human rights, he said, the government "will staunchly oppose any and all instrumentalization and politicization of this issue," but will strive to protect rights.

Diop said the government participated in the internal review in the hope it would "respond to the deep aspirations of the Malian people."

"That has not come to pass," the foreign minister said. "However, the government of Mali remains open to dialogue with the United Nations in the coming months to ultimately identify the way ahead."

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia called security "the overriding priority" during Mali's transition "owing to the security vacuum resulting from a hasty withdrawal of French and European military units."

	<p>Nonetheless, he said, Malian forces over the last few months “have demonstrated that they can indeed achieve results in the fight against terrorism,” adding that the Russian training “is bearing fruit.”</p> <p>When it comes to the options for reconfiguring MINUSMA, Nebenzia said, Mali’s needs and opinion are “an overriding priority.”</p> <p>By contrast, U.S. envoy Mills expressed serious concern at the transitional government’s restrictions on MINUSMA which make its extremely volatile operating environment more dangerous for peacekeepers and civilians.</p> <p>He demanded that the government lift all restrictions, reiterating the internal review’s conclusion that MINUSMA’s success will hinge on the support it gets from the transitional authorities.</p> <p>Mills said continued obstructions “should force this council to seriously reconsider its support for MINUSMA in its current form.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Peru protest ‘deactivators’ run into tear gas
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/protests-and-demonstrations-chemical-weapons-peru-government-caribbean-dina-boluarte-d114e4d7de95a547ae1a31df38796f30
GIST	<p>LIMA, Peru (AP) — When police fire tear gas at protesters demanding the resignation of Peruvian President Dina Boluarte, most run away.</p> <p>A few, though, run toward the gas canisters as quickly as possible — to neutralize them.</p> <p>These are the “deactivators.” Donning gas masks, safety goggles and thick gloves, these volunteers grab the hot canisters and toss them inside large plastic bottles filled with a mixture of water, baking soda and vinegar.</p> <p>The deactivators made their debut in Peru street protests in 2020, inspired by protesters in Hong Kong who in 2019 unveiled new strategies to counteract the eye-stinging, breath-stealing effects of tear gas. With protesters in Lima facing a nearly daily fusillade of tear gas, more people have joined the ranks of deactivators trying to shield them and keep the demonstrations going.</p> <p>Peruvians have been protesting since early December, when former President Pedro Castillo was impeached after a failed attempt to dissolve Congress. His vice president, Boluarte, immediately took over — and has faced strong opposition ever since.</p> <p>Fifty-eight people have died in connection with the unrest, including one police officer. Forty-six of the deaths occurred during direct clashes between protesters and police.</p> <p>The protests have exposed deep divisions in the country between the urban elites and the rural poor.</p> <p>Demonstrations were first largely concentrated in the south, a long-neglected region of Peru that felt a particular kinship to Castillo’s humble background as a rural teacher from the Andean highlands. But earlier this month, thousands descended on Peru’s capital, and police met them with tear gas. Lots and lots of tear gas.</p> <p>On Thursday, as protesters gathered in downtown Lima, Alexander Gutiérrez Padilla, 45, was giving a brief course to anyone who would listen around Plaza San Martín about how to mix vinegar and baking soda into the water and how to grab the tear gas canisters most efficiently.</p> <p>“If we don’t deactivate, people disperse and the protest breaks,” Gutiérrez said. “That’s why we’re pillars of this demonstration.”</p>

Next to him was Wilfredo Huertas Vidal, 25, who has taken it upon himself to collect donations to buy gloves and other protective equipment and hand them out to those who want to help.

“Who wants gloves? Who wants gloves?” he yelled as he stood next to several large bottles of water, gas masks and eye goggles.

When protesters descended on Lima earlier this month, old networks were reactivated. A tactic first seen in Peru in late 2020 during protests against then-President Manuel Merino resurfaced.

Vladimir Molina, 34, who participated in the 2020 protests, now runs what he calls a “brigade.” It consists of around 60 people, including paramedics, deactivators and “front-line” activists who stand in the middle of protesters and police with shields, in an effort to block any pellets or tear gas police may fire into the crowd.

“Every day more and more people are joining,” Molina said. Interest in his group is so great that he’s made it a requirement for anyone who wants to join to have their own equipment.

By tossing the hot tear gas cartridges into the water solution, “what they do is extinguish the pyrotechnical charge so the tear gas cannot come out anymore,” said Sven Eric Jordt, a professor of anesthesiology at Duke University.

Water alone should achieve what the protesters want, although the carbon dioxide created by mixing vinegar and baking soda could “form a foam bath that suffocates the charge” further, Jordt speculated.

It may be only a matter of time before authorities deploy methods to blunt the deactivators’ effectiveness. Manufacturers are now developing tear gas with plastic cartridges that stick to the road so it “can’t be lifted up anymore,” Jordt said.

Fearful of being targeted by police and prosecutors, many of the deactivators prefer to remain anonymous, keeping their faces covered even when there’s no tear gas around.

Boluarte has given strong backing to law enforcement, and the government recently announced a bonus for police officers. Boluarte has characterized the work of police controlling the Lima protests as “immaculate,” despite their often indiscriminate firing of tear gas and pellets. In contrast, she says the demonstrations are violent and financed by drug-trafficking rings and illegal miners.

Andrea Fernández, 22, is new to deactivating tear gas.

“The truth is I love the adrenaline,” Fernández said shortly after grabbing a pair of gloves from Huertas and listening to the instructions closely.

She said she hadn’t been really interested in the country’s political crisis at first. Then the deaths started piling up.

“There are a lot of farmers who’ve come from lots of parts of Peru and they come here to march, face-to-face, but don’t have the necessary protection,” Fernández said.

Felix Davillo, 37, also says the casualties pushed him to become a deactivator.

“I made this decision for all the death that is going on in Puno right now,” Davillo said, referring to a region in Peru that has experienced some of the deadliest protests.

A general lack of protective equipment has also meant protesters have been injured by the widespread use of less lethal weapons.

	<p>From January 19 to 24, Doctors Without Borders treated 73 patients at the Lima protests suffering from exposure to tear gas, pellet wounds, contusions or psychological distress, the non-profit organization said.</p> <p>The deactivators' increased chance of injury doesn't scare Julio Incarocas Beliz, who grabbed one of the big water bottles in the plaza for his first day trying to diffuse tear gas.</p> <p>"I served in the military and I've never been afraid," Incarocas, 28, said. "I'm fighting for my homeland."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Online asylum system quickly overwhelmed
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/technology-united-states-government-caribbean-mexico-mobile-apps-49b38b18869ed3b2260fb6d774153456
GIST	<p>TIJUANA, Mexico (AP) — Hours before sunrise, migrants at one of Mexico's largest shelters wake up and go online, hoping to secure an appointment to try to seek asylum in the U.S. The daily ritual resembles a race for concert tickets when online sales begin for a major act, as about 100 people glide their thumbs over phone screens.</p> <p>New appointments are available each day at 6 a.m., but migrants find themselves stymied by error messages from the U.S. government's CBPOne mobile app that's been overloaded since the Biden administration introduced it Jan. 12.</p> <p>Many can't log in; others are able to enter their information and select a date, only to have the screen freeze at final confirmation. Some get a message saying they must be near a U.S. crossing, despite being in Mexico's largest border city.</p> <p>At Embajadores de Jesus in Tijuana, only two of more than 1,000 migrants got appointments in the first two weeks, says director Gustavo Banda.</p> <p>"We're going to continue trying, but it's a failure for us," Erlin Rodriguez of Honduras said after another fruitless run at an appointment for him, his wife and their two children one Sunday before dawn. "There's no hope."</p> <p>Mareni Montiel of Mexico was elated to select a date and time for her two children — then didn't get a confirmation code. "Now I'm back to zero," said Montiel, 32, who has been waiting four months at the shelter, where the sound of roosters fill the crisp morning air at the end of a rough, dirt road.</p> <p>CBPOne replaced an opaque patchwork of exemptions to a public health order known as Title 42 under which the U.S. government has denied migrants' rights to claim asylum since March 2020. People who have come from other countries find themselves in Mexico waiting for an exemption or policy change — unless they try to cross illegally into the U.S.</p> <p>If it succeeds, CBPOne could be used by asylum-seekers even if Title 42 is lifted as a safe, orderly alternative to illegal entry, which reached the highest level ever recorded in the U.S. in December. It could also discourage large camps on Mexico's side of the border, where migrants cling to unrealistic hopes.</p> <p>But a range of complaints have surfaced:</p> <p>— Applications are available in English and Spanish only, languages many of the migrants don't speak. Guerline Jozef, executive director of the Haitian Bridge Alliance, said authorities failed to take "the most basic fact into account: the national language of Haiti is Haitian Creole." U.S. Customs and Border Protection says it plans a Creole version in February; it has not announced other languages.</p> <p>— Some migrants, particularly with darker skin, say the app is rejecting required photos, blocking or delaying applications. CBP says it is aware of some technical issues, especially when new appointments</p>

are made available, but that users' phones may also contribute. It says a live photo is required for each login as a security measure.

The issue has hit Haitians hardest, said Felicia Rangel-Samponaro, director of The Sidewalk School, which assists migrants in Reynosa and Matamoros, across from Texas' Rio Grande Valley. Previously, about 80% of migrants admitted to seek asylum in the area were Haitian, Rangel-Samponaro said. On Friday, she counted 10 Black people among 270 admitted in Matamoros.

"We brought construction lights pointed at your face," she said. "Those pictures were still not able to go through. ... They can't get past the picture part."

— A requirement that migrants apply in northern and central Mexico doesn't always work. CBP notes the app won't work right if the locator function is switched off. It's also trying to determine if signals are bouncing off U.S. phone towers.

But not only is the app failing to recognize that some people are at the border, applicants outside the region have been able to circumvent the location requirement by using virtual private networks. The agency said it has found a fix for that and is updating the system.

— Some advocates are disappointed that there is no explicit special consideration for LGBTQ applicants. Migrants are asked if they have a physical or mental illness, disability, pregnancy, lack housing, face a threat of harm, or are under 21 years old or over 70.

Still, LGBTQ migrants are not disqualified. At Casa de Luz, a Tijuana shelter for about 50 LGBTQ migrants, four quickly got appointments. A transgender woman from El Salvador said she didn't check any boxes when asked about specific vulnerabilities.

The U.S. began blocking asylum-seekers under President Donald Trump on the grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19, though Title 42 is [not applied uniformly](#) and many deemed vulnerable are exempted.

Starting in President Joe Biden's first year in office until last week, CBP arranged exemptions through advocates, churches, attorneys and migrant shelters, without publicly identifying them or saying how many slots were available. The arrangement prompted allegations of favoritism and corruption. In December, CBP [severed ties](#) with one group that was charging Russians.

For CBP One to work, enough people must get appointments to discourage crossing the border illegally, said Leon Fresco, an immigration attorney and former aide to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat.

"If these appointments start dragging out to two or three or four months, it's going to be much harder to keep it going," he said. "If people aren't getting through, they won't use the program."

CBP, which schedules appointments up to two weeks out, declines to say how many people are getting in. But Enrique Lucero, director of migrant affairs for the city of Tijuana, said U.S. authorities are accepting 200 daily in San Diego, the largest border crossing. That's about the same as the previous system but well below the number of Ukrainians processed after Russia's invasion last year.

Josue Miranda, 30, has been staying at Embajadores de Jesus for five months and prefers the old system of working through advocacy groups. The shelter compiled an internal waiting list that moved slowly but allowed him to know where he stood. Banda, the shelter director, said 100 were getting selected every week.

Miranda packed his suitcases for him, his wife and their three children, believing his turn was imminent until the new online portal was introduced. Now, the Salvadoran migrant has no idea when, or if, his chance will come. Still, he plans to keep trying through CBP One.

	"The problem is that the system is saturated and it's chaos," he said after another morning of failed attempts.
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HEADLINE	01/28 Population center trending toward South
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/politics-pandemics-north-carolina-cf7f8142485a7d661d961cba9048a7d4
GIST	<p>ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The U.S. population center is on track this decade to take a southern swerve for the first time in history, and it's because of people like Owen Glick, who moved from California to Florida more than a year ago.</p> <p>Last year, the South outgrew other U.S. regions by well over 1 million people through births outpacing deaths and domestic and international migration, according to population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau. The Northeast and Midwest lost residents, and the West grew by an anemic 153,000 people, primarily because a large number of residents left for a different U.S. region. The West would have lost population if not for immigrants and births outpacing deaths.</p> <p>In contrast, the South grew by 1.3 million new residents, and six of the 10 U.S. states with the biggest growth last year were in the South, led in order by Texas, Florida, North Carolina and Georgia.</p> <p>Experts aren't sure at this point if the dramatic pull of the South is a short-term change spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic or a long-term trend, or even what impact it will have on the reallocation of political power through redistricting after the 2030 census. Because of delays caused by the pandemic, changes were made in how the Census Bureau has calculated the estimates this decade, and that, too, may have had an impact.</p> <p>But experts say the Southern allure has to do with a mix of housing affordability, lower taxes, the popularity of remote work during the pandemic era and baby boomers retiring.</p> <p>Glick, 56, and his then-partner moved to the Orlando area from metro San Diego in December 2021 after he retired from his job in corporate sales. They had been making regular trips to central Florida before their move, to check on rental properties they had purchased because they were more affordable in the Sunshine State than in Southern California.</p> <p>While the cost of housing and food is lower than in California, there are hidden home upkeep costs in Florida, such as the need to paint more often because of the unrelenting sun and higher utility bills from year-round air conditioning, he said.</p> <p>"You're in better financial shape in terms of prices here, but there are more expenditures to maintain properties," Glick said.</p> <p>Glick was among the 233,000 people who left a Western state and planted roots in a different region from mid-2021 to mid-2022. He joined the ranks of the almost 868,000 people who moved to a Southern state from another region.</p> <p>If the trend continues through the rest of this decade, by 2030 the mean center of the U.S. population will head due south from a rural county in the Missouri Ozarks, without a westward extension for the first time in history, according to urban planner Alex Zakrewsky, who models the population center.</p> <p>Since the population center was first calculated to be in Chestertown, Maryland, in 1790, it has moved continuously westward, though it started taking a more southwestern tilt in the 20th century as the spread of air conditioning made the South more livable.</p> <p>"If this really pans out, it is really historical," said Zakrewsky, a principal planner for Middlesex County, New Jersey.</p>

North Carolina state demographer Michael Cline said the growth in the South has been “above and beyond” trends the region experienced before the pandemic, which he thinks may have accelerated many movers’ decisions to relocate from cold-climate states or allowed people to work remotely for the first time.

The departures from the West started in 2021, during the first full year of the pandemic, when 145,000 residents moved to another U.S. region. Up until then, domestic migration to the West had increased each year since 2010.

A substantial portion of the departures was due to people leaving California, but Alaska, Hawaii, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington also had year-to-year losses in domestic migration from 2021 to 2022. Additionally, in several Western states that had year-to-year increases in domestic migration — Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nevada and Utah — those increases were smaller than in the previous year.

In Oregon, the jury is still out on whether the phenomenon of more than 17,000 departures to other U.S. states was a temporary, pandemic-related trend due to remote-working freedoms and housing affordability, or whether it’s a longer-term movement due to quality of life issues such as crime, weather or wildfires, said Josh Lehner, an economist for the state.

Oregon, which [gained a congressional seat](#) in 2021 from the previous decade’s boom, hadn’t experienced a population decline since the 1980s, when the lumber industry downsized and the housing market collapsed.

“If we aren’t seeing that growth in labor force as we normally do, that means economic activity will be slower, state revenues will be lower. It’s a question we are struggling with,” Lehner said.

Lehner added that he wanted to see more data from 2023 “before I freak out.”

William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Metro think tank, also wants to see if the trend is only related to the pandemic or has legs through the rest of the decade. A big wild card is immigration, which was responsible for most of the growth in 2022, he said.

“Some of that has to do with getting away from the big dense coastal metros to somewhere else,” Frey said. “One thing that needs to be questioned is if the patterns of the past two years will continue for the rest of the decade.”

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HEADLINE	01/28 Group: King Co. homeless deaths record
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/group-works-honor-lives-lost-after-king-county-sees-record-number-homeless-deaths-2022/FF7I5IJOHZEQLPBYBFIEWGHAey/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — New data from the King County Medical Examiner shows a grim milestone in the country’s homelessness crisis. 310 people died while experiencing homelessness last year on King County streets.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the Homeless Remembrance Project is working to ensure their lives aren’t forgotten by hosting vigils.</p> <p>One of the lives they’ve helped honor is Trenton Harris, who was murdered last August.</p> <p>“It was a senseless act. So we don’t even know why he was murdered,” said Jennifer Dobbins, Trenton’s mom.</p> <p>She said he was known on the streets of Seattle as ‘Rex.’</p> <p>“He was 30 years old. He had fiery red hair, hazel eyes. He was very loved,” said Dobbins.</p>

	<p>He was one of the county's 310 homeless that died last year — a tragic record.</p> <p>"Unless there are drastic changes, there are going to be more this year. It's gonna be worse," said Anita Freeman with the Homeless Remembrance Project.</p> <p>Freeman said this deadly trend has already carried over to 2023.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the group came together to honor 'Dumi' Longwe, a man they didn't know. He recently died outside the Ballard library from an overdose.</p> <p>"We gather to do one of these vigils so that the person is not ignored or forgotten," said Rev. Pat Simpson.</p> <p>The women call themselves the "Women in Black." They gather for vigils outside Seattle's city hall. The group has met for more than 20 years.</p> <p>Their impact is felt by family members like Dobbins.</p> <p>"The Homeless Remembrance Project — I have so much love for them. They did a vigil for my son, and I didn't even know about it," said Dobbins.</p> <p>In recent years the group's vigils have become more frequent, but their mission remains. They're dedicated to giving dignity to the unhoused and mitigating the growing homeless crisis.</p> <p>"Our city, and cities around the county ... nobody's found the magic solution. It's hard, long-term dedicated workers that are needed," said Rev. Simpson.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Residential treatment facility for mentally ill
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/investigations/washington-first-residential-treatment-facility-mentally-ill-defendants/281-be460f3d-581e-40fd-85c5-7ea29b860a21
GIST	<p>CENTRALIA, Wash. — Gov. Jay Inslee and DSHS Secretary Jilma Meneses were among the state officials who opened the Civil Center for Behavioral Health at Maple Lane on Friday with a ribbon cutting ceremony in Centralia.</p> <p>This is the state's first treatment center located in a community setting to treat people who've been charged with a crime but had the charges dropped after being found incompetent to stand trial. Instead of getting released, this population has been ordered by a judge to undergo what's called civil commitment until they're deemed safe to go back into the community.</p> <p>Prior to this facility, civilly committed patients were ordered to stay at a state-run psychiatric hospital, such as the immense Western State Hospital in Steilacoom. Inslee said the center at Maple Lane aligns with the state's goal set in 2018 of de-centralizing these services from huge hospital settings and instead treating people in their communities.</p> <p>"I could not be more excited about what this represents, which is one of the first steps in the transformation of how we provide mental health to our families and our communities," said Gov. Inslee at the ceremony.</p> <p>The center will operate around the clock for 16 people at a time. The first patients will be transferred from Western State Hospital next month.</p> <p>One of the goals in opening the facility is to help alleviate the current crisis, brought to light by the KING 5 Investigation "Mentally Ill, Waiting in Jail," of a record number of mentally ill inmates waiting in jails across the state for a bed at Western or Eastern State Hospital. These are defendants who don't understand the charges against them and need treatment to restore competency to stand trial.</p>

	<p>Approximately 870 people are waiting for competency services without treatment or the ability to move forward in the criminal justice system. Some inmates are waiting up to 10 months and longer, which is in violation of state law and federal and superior court orders.</p> <p>“This (new treatment center) will help that problem because it will allow more beds to be available for those people who need competency to be restored. So it’s not just for the civil side, it’s not just for our neighbors who have a problem, but it also relieves the pressure on people who are on the (criminal) side of the situation.</p> <p>The Civil Center for Behavioral Health cost \$20.2 million and includes a host of state-of-the-art features including solar power, natural daylight throughout, native landscaping that doesn’t require irrigation and enclosed outdoor spaces.</p> <p>In addition to this facility, DSHS is working to open more new beds to meet the growing demand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 58 new beds at Western State Hospital, to open in 2023 • 30 additional beds on the Maple Lane campus for people found not guilty by reason of insanity, to open in 2023 • 48 beds in Clark County near Vancouver scheduled to open in 2024 <p>“Our deeply held value is to provide person-centered care, recognizing the humanity in all of our patients, and we will use this approach in all aspects of patient care,” said DSHS Sec. Meneses.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Day 340 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/29/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-340-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The European Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, said ahead of an EU-Ukraine summit next week that Ukraine had unconditional support from the bloc and needed to prevail against Russian attacks to defend European values. “We stand by Ukraine’s side without any ifs and buts. Ukraine is fighting for our shared values, it is fighting for the respect of international law and for the principles of democracy and that is why Ukraine has to win this war.” • A Russian strike killed three people in a residential district of the eastern Ukrainian city of Kostiantynivka on Saturday, the regional governor said. Fourteen other people were wounded in the attack, which also damaged four apartment buildings and a hotel. According to Ukraine’s defence ministry, Russia carried out attacks on Konstantynivka with multiple rocket launchers. • Russia accused the Ukrainian military of deliberately striking a hospital in a Russian-held area of eastern Ukraine on Saturday. It said a strike killed 14 people and wounded 24 patients and medical staff. The strike hit a hospital in the Russian-held settlement of Novoaidar and was carried out using a US-supplied Himars rocket launch system, the Russian defence ministry said. The claims could not be independently verified, AP reported. • Kyiv and its western allies are engaged in “fast-track” talks on the possibility of equipping Ukraine with long-range missiles and military aircraft, a top aide to Ukraine’s president says, AP reported. Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Ukraine’s supporters in the west “understand how the war is developing” and the need to supply planes capable of providing cover for the armoured fighting vehicles that the United States and Germany have pledged. • Ukraine said on Friday it would take its pilots about half a year to train for combat in western fighter jets such as US F-16s, as Kyiv steps up its campaign to secure fourth-generation warplanes. Ukraine got a huge boost this week when Germany and the United States announced plans to provide heavy tanks to Kyiv, which is now hoping the west will also provide long-range missiles and fighter jets. • North Korea on Saturday denounced US pledges of battle tanks, claiming Washington was “further crossing the red line” to win hegemony by proxy war, Reuters quoted state media KCNA reporting. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un’s sister, Kim Yo-jong, made the remarks in a

	<p>statement, saying that North Korea will “stand in the same trench” as Russia against the United States.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia’s deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, will hold a meeting with Lynne Tracy, the new US ambassador to Moscow, early next week, the RIA news agency reported. • Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Saturday redoubled his efforts to stop Russian athletes participating the 2024 Olympics, saying they would try to justify the war against Ukraine if allowed to compete. Zelenskiy said on Friday that Ukraine would launch an international campaign to keep Russia out of the summer games, which will be held in Paris. Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said on Friday that any attempt to squeeze Moscow out of international sport because of what it calls its special military operation in Ukraine was “doomed to fail”.
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HEADLINE	01/27 Protesters call for justice, police reforms
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/28/tyre-nichols-protests-marches-police-violence
GIST	<p>Protests were taking place in multiple US cities after police released footage of Tyre Nichols’ fatal beating at the hands of Memphis police.</p> <p>The video released late Friday shows several Memphis officers kicking Nichols repeatedly in the head, punching him in the face, and hitting him with a baton.</p> <p>Officers and medical personnel failed to intervene after the attacks left Nichols unable to sit upright. Five of the involved officers have been fired and charged with second-degree murder.</p> <p>The protests remained largely peaceful throughout the night on Friday, and there were more protests taking place on Saturday and planned for the coming days.</p> <p>Protestors in Memphis, where the fatal beating took place, poured onto Interstate 55, a highway that connects Tennessee and Arkansas, on Friday night to express their outrage at the video and ongoing excessive force used by Memphis police.</p> <p>Nyliayh Stewart, 24, joined protestors and discussed the killing of her cousin by a white Memphis police officer during a traffic stop.</p> <p>“This should not have happened,” said Stewart. “This family should not have to bury him. My family should not have had to bury my cousin.”</p> <p>In New York, dozens of protestors gathered in Times Square after the video’s release, decrying the brutal beating and police brutality at large. “What’s his name? Tyre! Say his name. Tyre!” the demonstrators chanted while holding up signs.</p> <p>At least one person was arrested for allegedly attempting to smash a police car’s windshield. Two more were arrested during the demonstrations, but official charges are still pending, according to a report from ABC News 7.</p> <p>Demonstrators also met in the city’s Union Square and Grand Central terminal, which police limited access to given the expected protests.</p> <p>Several smaller groups in Chicago hosted rallies and vigils in response to the brutal video, the Chicago Tribune reported.</p> <p>Groups of 10 to 20 people held peaceful demonstrations in front of the Chicago police department headquarters in the Bronzeville neighborhood and in several other communities. “We’re tired of being murdered, tired of being beaten, tired of being chased,” said Rabbi Michael Ben Yosef, who joined demonstrators in front of the department headquarters, according to ABC 7 Chicago.</p>

Nearly 100 people rallied in Washington DC's Lafayette Square in response to the video.

Dozens of protestors also marched in Philadelphia's Center City, as organizers spoke out against the video and police violence.

"It's absolutely disgusting," said Talia Giles, an organizer with the Party for Socialism and Liberation, during a speech at Friday's demonstration.

"It shows the complete and utter disregard for human life. It shows the fact that police, no matter what their race is, are going to terrorize people because that's what the system is meant to do. It's meant to abuse its power against citizens."

About 100 people gathered outside the Los Angeles police department headquarters to protest following the released footage.

The protest was borne out of a candlelight vigil that was taking place, where attendees burned sage and played audio from the video clips of officers fatally beating Nichols, reported the Los Angeles Times.

In Portland, more than 100 protestors gathered to decry the video and the routine pattern of police brutality against Black people.

"Why did it happen again? why is it still happening? why is it happening again? why is it happening now?" said a protestor, according to KGW8.

Protesters marched in Atlanta on Saturday following a night of protests shortly after the released video.

Despite peaceful protests, Republican governor Brian Kemp declared a state of emergency on Thursday and authorized the deployment of as many as 1,000 National Guard troops in light of the released video.

The declaration also came following protests in Atlanta over a controversial police training center that would bulldoze one of the city's largest green spaces.

Organizers in Newark, New Jersey held a rally and march at 12.00pm to condemn the beating of Nichols.

"The message that we want to get out is that police brutality must stop. This problem continues to grow," said Lawrence Hamm, chairman of People's Organization for Progress, to News 12 New Jersey.

Activists also gathered to protest the decision of a grand jury this week to not indict a Newark police officer who fatally shot Carl Dorsey, a Black man.

New York organizers planned additional protests throughout Saturday.

Street Riders NYC, an activist group, held a bike ride in light of the release video.

A march demanding justice for Nichols has also been planned for 5.00pm in New York's Washington Square park.

Civil rights leaders have spoken about the footage, calling out repeated instances of police brutality against Black people.

In a statement shared Saturday, Reverend Al Sharpton spoke about yet another example of police brutality against a Black man.

"Once again, we are forced to watch another horrific video of cops using brutal force to kill a Black man," said Sharpton, who will be speaking at a rally on Saturday.

	“Nearly three years after the murder of George Floyd shook the world, here we are.”
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HEADLINE	01/28 Russia turns to architect of the war
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/28/us/politics/russia-generals-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Gen. Valery V. Gerasimov, the architect of President Vladimir V. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, took over the day-to-day running of Russia’s war effort this month by convincing his boss that his predecessor was too passive, American and European officials say.</p> <p>But General Gerasimov’s turbocharged strategy is what led to Russia’s problems to begin with, and Moscow still does not have the troops, ammunition or equipment that military officials say it needs to mass the big offensive promised by the country’s senior military leader.</p> <p>Since General Gerasimov replaced Gen. Sergei Surovikin, who was in the job for only three months, Russia’s military leadership has focused on tactical issues like whether troops should travel in civilian vehicles and the dangers of their cellphone use, Western officials say. But while those matters have certainly bedeviled service members, there is no evidence that the Russian military has begun to address its fundamental problems, like shortages of ammunition and well-trained troops, despite the musical chairs of generals, according to these officials.</p> <p>In Washington, where military and defense officials walk the halls of the Pentagon with lists of the steadily growing number of Russian generals who have been fired or demoted during 11 months of war (nine so far), the latest installment of who’s in charge is viewed as part of a drama with an ever-evolving cast of characters who have not gotten the job done.</p> <p>“It’s kind of like a reality TV show,” Colin H. Kahl, the under secretary of defense for policy, told reporters last week. “And I think it’s more indicative that the Russians have still not figured it out about how they intend to command the fight, and I think the dysfunction among Russian commanders is pretty profound.”</p> <p>Now on his third overall war commander, Mr. Putin has accomplished few of his goals. Russian troops have failed to seize Kyiv, the capital; President Volodymyr Zelensky is still in power; Ukraine has closer ties to the West than ever; and despite signs of some cracks, NATO remains united. Even Russia’s more limited goal of taking over the entire eastern region of Donbas remains elusive.</p> <p>To fix this mess, Mr. Putin has turned to none other than General Gerasimov.</p> <p>For 10 years, General Gerasimov was believed to be working to modernize the Russian armed forces as the chief of general staff for the military — the equivalent of the U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He had studied American misadventures in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, the former Yugoslavia and Libya, and aimed to incorporate those insights into the plans.</p> <p>But evidence of that effort has yet to emerge on the Ukrainian battlefield.</p> <p>General Gerasimov, 67, comes complete with contradictions that characterize senior Russian leaders: His counterparts in the West say he has personal integrity, but that he pushes the lies of his government. He told Western officials early last year that Russia had no intention of invading Ukraine; weeks later, Russian troops had crossed the border. He has also remained close to Mr. Putin, who appointed him head of his military more than a decade ago.</p> <p>In rare public comments, mimicking Mr. Putin’s propaganda, General Gerasimov portrayed Russia as a victim of Western aggression, without explaining his strategy to neutralize the perceived threat.</p>

“Our country and its armed forces today are opposing practically the entire collective West,” he said in an interview with the Russian newspaper Arguments and Facts published on Jan. 24, adding that NATO is “using Ukraine for a hybrid war against our nation.”

As he sought to overhaul the Russian military, General Gerasimov elevated the irregular warfare tactics that he falsely believed that Americans were conducting, instead of focusing on what the United States did well — combined arms warfare, blending various military capabilities to create overwhelming force, Seth G. Jones, the national security expert, argues in his book “Three Dangerous Men.”

As a result, Russia’s military gained expertise in subterfuge and clandestine tactics, like sending Russian Spetsnaz special forces units, without insignia, to Crimea before Russia illegally annexed the peninsula in 2014.

But the war in Ukraine has required a different kind of maneuvering: offensive campaigns by large numbers of ground forces operating in different areas with the goal of seizing land. There, General Gerasimov has been ineffective.

The troops sent to take Kyiv in the early days of the war lacked even basic supplies and soon stalled outside the city. He did not hone the military’s ability to move large numbers of different kinds of troops, by land, air and sea, yet his invasion plan depended on that. Russian forces got bogged down, and then eviscerated, in northern Ukrainian cities and towns.

General Gerasimov himself almost fell victim to his military’s poor planning when, in late April, he narrowly escaped being killed in a Ukrainian strike when he visited troops. Dozens of Russians were killed instead, in an incident that prompted Moscow to scale back visits from leaders to the front.

“This goes to the lack of serious training and operational experience in the Russian Ministry of Defense,” said Frederick Hodges, a retired lieutenant general and former top U.S. Army commander in Europe. “When you get into a real war, like the one in Ukraine, all their shortcomings are immediately exposed.”

The result of those shortcomings was on display last November in a scene broadcast on Russian state television. Standing in front of a map and a Russian flag, and wearing army fatigues, General Surovikin announced Russia’s retreat from the southern city of Kherson, calling it a “difficult” decision.

“Having assessed the situation, I propose to take up defense on the left bank of the Dnipro,” he told his superiors, in a reference to the river that offered the sole remaining escape route.

Missing from the scripted televised meeting was Mr. Putin — an absence, American and NATO officials said, that reflected his desire to distance himself from what was by any account a stunning military defeat.

Just a month earlier, General Surovikin had been appointed to lead the Ukraine effort, replacing Gen. Aleksandr Dvornikov.

But General Surovikin, according to American military officials and Biden administration officials, had solidified a shaky Russian position in Ukraine, particularly in the south. He had pushed for Russian forces to abandon Kherson and conducted a retreat that minimized Russian casualties. He then focused his forces on what the U.S. military calls “defense in depth,” building secondary trench lines.

While his defensive moves raised worries in Washington that Russia might be able to withstand renewed Ukrainian offensives, Russian military bloggers had a far different reaction.

The bloggers, who have emerged as an influential voice during the conflict, criticized the Russian military command for the retreat from Kherson. Mr. Putin had been uncomfortable with that plan, initially rejecting General Surovikin’s recommendation to pull back. U.S. and allied officials believe that General Gerasimov and Sergei K. Shoigu, the Russian defense minister, used Mr. Putin’s skepticism of the defensive stance against General Surovikin.

American officials predicted in December that General Gerasimov and Mr. Shoigu would try to reassert their control over the military amid intense jockeying for Mr. Putin's ear. In January, the two made their move, engineering a field demotion for General Surovikin.

The officials say that General Gerasimov and Mr. Shoigu attacked General Surovikin's defensive posture and proposed a return to the "hyper offensive," with a potential initial goal of taking Kramatorsk, in the east. Russian-controlled separatists initially took the city in 2014 but were driven out by Ukrainian forces during an earlier phase of the war.

In another sign of a broader shake-up, Gen. Col. Mikhail Teplinsky has probably been dismissed as one of Russia's key operational commanders in Ukraine, according to a British defense intelligence assessment this week.

"Teplinsky was the officer on the ground in charge of Russia's relatively successful withdrawal from west of the Dnipro in November 2022, and he has received praise in Russia as a capable and pragmatic commander," the assessment said.

Promoting General Gerasimov, U.S. and other Western military officials say, was intended to both deflect criticism of the war effort from the military bloggers and to check the rising power of Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the mercenary group Wagner that has spearheaded the bloody Russian offensive at Bakhmut in the Donbas. Mr. Prigozhin has also been a staunch supporter of General Surovikin.

"The recent shake-up in commanders of the war effort seems like the result of political infighting and cronyism," said Dara Massicot, senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation in Washington.

With Mr. Putin still insisting that Russia will seize the Donbas and even Kyiv, expectations are rising that General Gerasimov will be under immense pressure to carry out a successful offensive this spring, military officials and analysts say.

"It's now on him, and I suspect Putin has unrealistic expectations again," Mark Galeotti, who studies Russian security affairs, said in a Twitter message, calling General Gerasimov's promotion "the most poisoned of chalices."

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HEADLINE	01/28 Memphis PD disbands controversial unit
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/28/memphis-permanently-disbands-scorpion-unit-death-tyre-nichols/7071674953655/
GIST	<p>Jan. 28 (UPI) -- The Memphis Police Department announced Saturday that its Scorpion police unit has been permanently deactivated after the death of Tyre Nichols.</p> <p>The decision came after it was revealed that all five police officers who have been charged with murder for Nichols' death were members of the controversial unit, fully named the "Street Crimes Operations to Restore Peace In Our Neighborhoods," which was launched to company crime in November 2021.</p> <p>"In the process of listening intently to the family of Tyre Nichols, community leaders and the uninvolved officers who have done quality work in their assignments, it is in the best interest of all to permanently deactivate the SCORPION unit," the Memphis Police Department said in a statement.</p> <p>"The officers currently assigned to the unit agree unreservedly with this next step. While the heinous actions of a few casts a cloud of dishonor on the title of SCORPION, it is imperative that we, the Memphis Police Department, take proactive steps in the healing process for all impacted."</p> <p>Authorities released video footage showing the five officers beating Nichols and using stun guns on him as he called out for his mother during a traffic stop on Jan. 7. Nichols died three days later.</p>

The officers -- Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, [Justin Smith](#) and Desmond Mills Jr. - have all been fired from the department and charged with second-degree murder. They were released Friday after posting bail.

On Friday, [protesters took to the streets](#) in cities across the country on Friday following the release of footage.

Civil rights attorney Ben Crump and Tony Romanucci, who are representing the Nichols family, [issued a statement](#) Saturday after the decision to disband the Scorpion unit.

"The Nichols family and their legal team find the decision to permanently disband this unit to be both appropriate and proportional to the tragic death of Tyre Nichols, and also a decent and just decision for all citizens in Memphis," the statement reads.

"We hope that other cities take similar action with their saturation police units in the near future to begin to create greater trust in their communities. We must keep in mind that this is just the next step on this journey for justice and accountability, as clearly this misconduct is not restricted to these specialty units. It extends much further."

Patrice Robinson, a member of the Memphis City Council, told CNN on Saturday that disbanding the Scorpion unit does not go far enough.

"Our community deserves better. We have to fight the bad players in our community, and now we've got to fight our own police officers. That is deplorable," Robinson said. "We're going to have to do something."

JB Smiley Jr., another member of the city council, [told CNN](#) that deactivating the unit was "absolutely necessary."

"My concern going forward is to make sure we don't create another unit and just call it something else. We have to be intentional about making sure that we restructure everything as it relates to these types of units going into the communities and terrorizing people," Smiley said.

"What you would almost expect at the next council meeting, there will be a series of legislation addressing Memphis police, police transparency, excessive force, body cam and, more specifically as it relates to this, training."

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HEADLINE	01/29 Iran: drone attack on military site thwarted
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/blast-heard-military-plant-irans-central-city-isfahan-state-media-2023-01-28/
GIST	<p>DUBAI, Jan 29 (Reuters) - A loud explosion at a military plant in Iran's central city of Isfahan was caused by an "unsuccessful" drone attack, Iranian state media reported on Sunday, citing the defence ministry.</p> <p>"One of (the drones) was hit by the ... air defence and the other two were caught in defence traps and blew up. Fortunately, this unsuccessful attack did not cause any loss of life and caused minor damage to the workshop's roof," the ministry said in a statement carried by the state news agency IRNA.</p> <p>Iranian news agencies earlier reported the loud blast and carried a video showing a flash of light at the plant, said to be an ammunition factory, and footage of emergency vehicles and fire trucks outside the plant.</p> <p>In July, Iran said it had arrested a sabotage team made up of Kurdish militants working for Israel who planned to blow up a "sensitive" defence industry centre in Isfahan.</p>

	<p>The announcement came amid heightening tensions with arch-enemy Israel over Tehran's nuclear programme. Israel says Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons. Tehran denies this.</p> <p>"(The attack) has not affected our installations and mission...and such blind measures will not have an impact on the continuation of the country's progress," the defence ministry statement said.</p> <p>There have been a number of explosions and fires around Iranian military, nuclear and industrial facilities in the past few years.</p> <p>In 2021, Iran accused Israel of sabotaging its key Natanz nuclear site and vowed revenge for an attack that appeared to be the latest episode in a long-running covert war.</p> <p>The blasts at sensitive Iranian sites have at times caused concern amid tensions over Iran's nuclear programme with Israel and the United States.</p> <p>Israel has long threatened military action against Iran if indirect talks between Washington and Tehran fail to salvage a 2015 nuclear pact.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Seattle peaceful protests for Nichols' video
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/protests-planned-seattle-wake-release-tyre-nichols-arrest-video/YGX266X26NDPDBGLFR4FWCW3O4/
GIST	<p>With the Memphis Police Department releasing bodycam footage of the arrest of of Tyre Nichols on Friday afternoon, peaceful protests took place around Seattle in the evening.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department said on Friday that it was “planning, preparing, and staffing to provide public safety throughout the city should police resources be needed.”</p> <p>One protest was organized by several activist groups and was scheduled for 7 p.m. at Cal Anderson Park. Another protest was set to happen at Pioneer Square at 6 p.m.</p> <p>A group of about 50 people did peacefully make their way from Cal Anderson Park to the Space Needle and back to Capitol Hill, calling for justice for Nichols.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell also commented on the release of the video, putting out a statement that reads, in part: <i>Unconscionable violence has no role in policing and is in direct opposition to keeping people safe. This is the kind of event that compromises and erodes trust in law enforcement not just in Memphis, but in cities and communities across the country. While the officers responsible have been terminated and charged, additional investigations and actions must create further accountability. Proactive, preventative measures, like those we have pioneered in Seattle, must be at the forefront of reform, not an afterthought when tragedies like this occur. I am proud that our Seattle Police Officers have openly rejected this injustice and violence.</i></p> <p>On Friday, KIRO 7 spoke to Victoria Beach, the chair of SPD’s African American Community Advisory Council, who said she is calling for any protests that happen in the city Friday night to remain peaceful.</p> <p>Beach believes what happened in Memphis can set an example on holding officers accountable for committing any sort of crime.</p> <p>“I think this is setting an example that if you are that type of officer, you are not going to get away with it. You are going to be held accountable immediately,” Beach said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Seattle ‘shadow epidemic’ surpasses Covid
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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/in-seattle-the-shadow-epidemic-has-passed-covid/
GIST	<p>COVID-19 isn't done with Seattle and King County. But after a three-year run, it's not the top emerging health scourge anymore. The coronavirus has been officially displaced.</p> <p>Drug overdoses are now killing more people than COVID.</p> <p>It started to happen last summer, in August, when more than 25 people died from drugs in a week, mostly from ingesting fentanyl, county records show. In the fall, drugs firmly dethroned COVID, when 339 people died during the quarter — nearly four per day, 70% more than were dying from COVID.</p> <p>As of Friday, 100 people have already died in 2023 from drug overdoses countywide. Forty-three have died of COVID.</p> <p>Drugs now are overwhelming the system, in some of the same ways that we all worked to prevent by wearing masks and socially distancing during coronavirus waves.</p> <p>“A key indication of just how bad things are at the end of 2022 and likely to get worse [in] 2023, the medical examiner’s office is now struggling with the issue of storing bodies because the fentanyl-related death toll continues to climb,” Public Health Director Dr. Faisal Khan, a medical epidemiologist, said at a health board meeting this month.</p> <p>Paramedics also are straining to keep up. There now are 20 drug overdose calls every day, roughly double from a year ago. (These are predominantly non-fatal overdoses.) Just in the month of December, “King County emergency medical services responded to 156 opioid overdoses in downtown Seattle,” an all-time record, the health department reported.</p> <p>Inside city limits, Seattle saw twice as many drug overdose deaths last year (541) as COVID deaths (273), health department records show.</p> <p>It isn't solely a downtown phenomenon. Kent, Renton and North Seattle near Shoreline also are marked dark red on the county's overdose map. A week ago there were 11 overdose calls out in West Seattle. Big cities to the north and south of us, Vancouver and San Francisco, also have seen drug deaths surpass COVID.</p> <p>“The number of overdose deaths has grown on an exponential scale,” the health department’s review of 2022 says. “Exponential” was the word they once used about the coronavirus — the fear that it might spread out of hand to the point it starts crippling the ability to respond to it.</p> <p>Not long ago the drug crisis was simmering at a lower level; one national news outlet dubbed it “an epidemic in the shadow of a pandemic.” It's not in the shadows anymore. COVID's force has waned, especially due to the vaccines. The drug epidemic just keeps maddeningly expanding.</p> <p>Obviously COVID comes from a virus that could infect anybody; drug addiction is viewed as more of an individual struggle. But the drug scourge is spreading to a degree that it's having severe effects on the broader community. There's the fate of downtown, which isn't going to recover with 156 overdose calls there monthly. And there's the human costs — the lost lives of those in the throes, but also of innocent bystanders such as 23-year-old student Jaahnavi Kandula, killed Jan. 23 when a police car hit her in a South Lake Union crosswalk as it was heading to the scene of yet another overdose.</p> <p>This past week the regional agency on homelessness released its five-year emergency shelter plan. It acknowledged there's a connection between substance abuse and Seattle's homelessness crisis (which seems like progress). It recommended something called “recovery housing” — drug-free shelter that also offers rehab counseling and support for people fresh off the streets.</p> <p>Then it said this: Due to the size of the addiction problem, we need an estimated 2,570 units of this recovery-based shelter. And right now we have ... zero units.</p>

HEADLINE	01/27 Judge tosses BLM protester Seattle lawsuit
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/judge-dismisses-lawsuit-from-protester-who-claimed-she-was-denied-medication-in-jail/
GIST	<p>A federal judge has dismissed a civil rights lawsuit filed by a former Seattle woman arrested during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests on Capitol Hill, finding she refused to cooperate with defense attorneys and violated a court order by rebuffing an independent mental exam.</p> <p>Samantha Six, now a Denver resident, sued the Seattle Police Department, the two officers who arrested her, and King County Jail officials, alleging authorities mistreated her during her arrest and ignored her repeated requests for medication needed to control epileptic seizures.</p> <p>At the time the lawsuit was filed in May 2021, Six's attorneys called the actions of police officers and county jail officials "unreasonable and excessive," and asked for unspecified damages for the violation of her civil rights. According to documents filed in the case, those lawyers withdrew their representation because of a "breakdown in communication with Ms. Six."</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Robert Lasnik dismissed Six's lawsuit "with prejudice," meaning it cannot be refiled, overruling a report by federal Magistrate Judge Richard Creatura, who had ruled the case should be dismissed but recommended that Six be given the option of refiling the action.</p> <p>"Plaintiff has made it clear that she will not prosecute her action in good faith and has willfully disobeyed this Court's order," Creatura wrote last month. Not only would Six not submit to a mental exam, she also declined to give a sworn deposition.</p> <p>Indeed, in response to an October 2022 email from an attorney for the two officers who arrested Six, advising her of the city's intention to move to dismiss her claims, she wrote: "Call it what you need to be at peace with yourself," followed by a middle-finger emoji.</p> <p>In an interview Thursday from Denver, Six said: "[Expletive] that city. Big time. Cops are cops."</p> <p>In a lengthy email to defense attorneys in August 2022, shortly after Six's attorneys had withdrawn from the case, Six explained that she refused to travel to Seattle for health and personal reasons.</p> <p>Her July 25, 2020, arrest on Capitol Hill was captured on bystander video and the officers' body-worn cameras, and it was widely distributed on social media, resulting in a number of complaints to the city's police watchdog agency, the Office of Police Accountability.</p> <p>The agency's investigation of Six's arrest cleared of wrongdoing the four involved officers, including Scott Luckie and Michael Eastman, who were named in the lawsuit.</p> <p>The agency's investigators found that the riot-gear-clad officers acted lawfully and properly while arresting Six and her then-husband for allegedly impeding police efforts to disperse an unruly crowd. The investigation also stated Six repeatedly swore and verbally abused officers and was "physically resisting" them during her arrest, but "none of the officers were deliberately indifferent to [her] medical conditions" even though they initially failed to recognize she'd fallen unconscious at one point.</p> <p>Six claimed she lost consciousness after police pulled her to the ground, then handcuffed her, dragged her across a sidewalk and held her down.</p> <p>She claimed that she begged police for anti-seizure medication from her backpack, which officers confiscated when they arrested her. Six said the backpack and its contents were never returned.</p>

	The lawsuit contends that after being booked into jail, Six was offered a used face mask stained with makeup, and at one point had a “spit hood” put over her head before jail officers placed her in an isolation cell typically reserved for people with mental health issues.
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HEADLINE	01/28 Fighting rages in eastern Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/28/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war-bakhmut.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Russian troops mounted a fierce assault on Ukrainian forces on Saturday in an effort to dislodge them from critical positions in eastern Ukraine, with Moscow seeking to protect vital supply routes and both armies jockeying for position in anticipation of new offensive campaigns.</p> <p>Russia has been trying for months to break through well-fortified Ukrainian defensive positions across the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, throwing wave after wave of soldiers into the fight and suffering heavy casualties but making few territorial gains.</p> <p>Those efforts have taken on greater urgency as Western and Ukrainian officials warn that Moscow plans to launch a large-scale assault aimed at regaining the upper hand, nearly a year after Russia invaded Ukraine. Military experts and Western officials say they also believe that Ukraine will try to mount an offensive of its own to drive Russia out of occupied areas in the east.</p> <p>“It is no secret that they are preparing for a new wave by Feb. 24,” Oleksiy Danilov, the head of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council, told Radio Liberty on Friday, referring to Russian forces and what will be the first anniversary of their full-scale invasion. Moscow’s immediate goal, he said, is to capture the entire Donetsk and Luhansk regions and then “to completely go beyond the borders of the regions.”</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia this month abruptly replaced the top commander of Russia’s war effort with Gen. Valery V. Gerasimov, who American officials believe secured the top job by vowing to go on the attack, with an initial goal of gaining ground quickly in the east.</p> <p>The epicenter of the fighting in eastern Ukraine since the summer has mainly been around the city of Bakhmut, which has taken on a symbolic significance that military analysts say outweighs its strategic importance.</p> <p>But in recent days Russian forces have stepped up their assaults on the town of Vuhledar, just over 90 miles south of Bakhmut. It sits at the intersection of the eastern front in the Donetsk region and the southern front in the Zaporizhzhia region, a location that makes it well positioned for resupplying Russian forces moving between the two fronts.</p> <p>Military analysts say that Ukrainian forces have been using their positions in and around Vuhledar to launch attacks on the region’s main railway hub in the occupied town of Volnovakha, less than 10 miles away, threatening Russia’s resupply efforts. Trains are essential for moving heavy equipment and large troop formations across the battlefield, so the more Ukrainian forces can cut off the lines running from Russia to southern Ukraine, the more they can isolate Russia’s forces in the region.</p> <p>In that light, pushing the Ukrainians back from Vuhledar would help Russia secure the train lines. It “guarantees Russia a stable supply of the southern part of the occupied territories,” according to an analysis issued on Saturday by the Conflict Intelligence Team, an independent group that analyzes open-source intelligence.</p> <p>Denis Pushilin, the Moscow-appointed leader of the Donetsk region, said that an eventual capture of Vuhledar by Russian forces “solves many problems,” and predicted that the town “may become a new, very important success for us,” according to Russian news reports on Friday.</p>

Ukrainian officials have rejected recent reports from Kremlin proxy officials and Russian military bloggers of advances in the area. Col. Sergei Cherevaty, the spokesman for Ukraine's eastern military command, reported fierce fighting around Vuhledar but said on Saturday that Ukrainian forces had thwarted the Russian attacks.

Neither the Russian nor the Ukrainian claims could be independently verified. Britain's Defense Intelligence Agency said on Friday that Russian military sources were probably "deliberately spreading misinformation in an effort to imply that the Russian operation is sustaining momentum."

In his overnight address to the nation on Friday, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine called the intensity of the fighting around Bakhmut and Vuhledar "extremely acute" and destructive.

"The occupiers are not just storming our positions — they are deliberately and methodically destroying these towns and villages around them," he said.

The devastating toll on civilians from those attacks was evident on Saturday morning in the village of Kostyantynivka, roughly 15 miles southwest of Bakhmut, where a Russian missile strike killed three people and wounded 14 others.

In the courtyard of a residential neighborhood, the body of a man lay sprawled on the ground amid wreckage and debris. His mother knelt over him, sobbing and stroking his side. Another corpse was covered by a sheet, splayed out near a wheelbarrow that the man had likely been pushing at the moment of impact.

A woman, smoking on a balcony above the courtyard, cried and shouted out to no one in particular: "I hate you all."

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HEADLINE	01/28 Memphis police videos show, don't show
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/01/28/tyre-nichols-police-video-description/
GIST	<p><i>Editor's note: The videos in this story contain graphic content.</i></p> <p>The footage released by Memphis police Friday evening shows the violent confrontation after police stopped Tyre Nichols for an alleged traffic violation on Jan. 7. Nichols died in a hospital on Jan. 10.</p> <p>The videos, which were edited by police before their release, were shot between 8:24 p.m. and 9:02 p.m. that night. The four clips collectively run about an hour in total.</p> <p>They include footage from police body cameras at two locations — the intersection of East Raines and Ross roads, where officers approach Nichols's car, and a residential neighborhood near his home. There is also a clip from a surveillance camera mounted on a pole in the neighborhood.</p> <p>The Washington Post has reviewed the footage in detail. Here is a description of what each video shows.</p> <p>Video 1: Tyre Nichols pulled from car, pushed to ground</p> <p>In video clip one, Nichols is pulled from his car and pushed to the ground by a group of police officers.</p> <p>"I didn't do anything!" Nichols says as officers shout at him using expletives.</p> <p>As Nichols is moved to the ground, a voice, presumably Nichols, can be heard saying: "You don't do that, okay?" and "All right, I'm on the ground."</p> <p>Nichols appears calm and can be seen sitting on the ground, while officers shout commands at him: "Turn around! Right now! Get on the ground!"</p>

“Okay, you guys are really doing a lot right now, stop,” Nichols says as multiple officers pin him to the ground and tell him to turn around and put his hands behind his back. “I’m just trying to go home!”

An officer warns Nichols, who is already on the ground, “Man, if you don’t lay down — ” to which Nichols responds “I am on the ground!”

The officer wearing the body camera appears to Taser Nichols, who is struggling to get away. After several seconds, Nichols gets up from the ground and sprints down the street.

The officer chases him, making a left turn and running about half a block before he stops, panting. He says over his radio: “Taser was deployed. Suspect is running down Ross [Road].”

“Young male Black, slim build, blue jeans, and a hoodie,” the officer says.

The officer arrives at an intersection with several others and appears out of breath. A sheriff’s car pulls up and an officer asks which way Nichols ran and for his description, then speeds off.

“I sprayed myself,” the officer wearing the body camera says, referring to pepper spray.

“Yeah, you sprayed me too,” another officers responds. “But luckily it didn’t get in my eyes, just on my eyebrow.”

The Memphis police remain in the intersection for several minutes and hear over their radio that Nichols has been found.

“I hope they stomp his a--,” one officer says as they wait.

“What?” another officer says.

“I hope they stomp his a--,” the officer repeats.

Video two: A security camera on a pole shows the beating

This 30-minute clip, recorded by a security camera on a pole, has no sound, but shows Memphis police delivered at least two kicks and two baton strikes, and five punches to Tyre Nichols’s face.

Two officers are seen struggling with Nichols, who is lying on the pavement, as they appear to try to handcuff him. At 8:34 p.m., a third officer can be seen exiting a police car and approaching them. After appearing to say something, he then takes a kick at Nichols, though it is unclear whether he makes contact with his head or another body part, as the officer appears to slip.

The officer appears to say something else — then takes another kick or swipe with his right leg, appearing to aim at Nichols’s arm.

Moments later, a fourth officer arrives, brandishes his police baton, and strikes Nichols in the back. The officer strikes him a second time and, as Nichols struggles to his feet, perhaps to avoid more blows, the same officer who did the kicking circles around and punches him in the face. That officer then punches him four more times, as the first two officers restrain his arms.

After hitting and kicking him for several moments, Nichols is handcuffed on his stomach. A police officer drags Nichols over to a car, where he sits him down.

At this point, there are at least seven officers on the scene, patting each other on the back and waving flashlights. Many are clearly out of breath; one fist-bumps another.

More than 15 minutes after the beating began, with Nichols in clear medical distress, no one is attending to his injuries. As police continue milling about, Nichols can no longer keep himself up with his back against the car and falls over to his side.

About 26 minutes into the clip, a medic appears and begins tending to Nichols's injuries. At this point, three officers are largely blocking his body from the camera.

An ambulance finally comes into view of the camera 30 minutes into the video. The ambulance blocks the view of Nichols being loaded onto the stretcher, and the video ends with the ambulance's red lights flashing in the video. A review of the timeline of events revealed that the ambulance arrived 22 minutes after officers announced Nichols was in custody.

Video three: Body-cam footage shows Nichols pinned by officers

Video clip three, from an officer's body-camera video, provides audio of the assault shown in video two. The video shows an officer leaving his car and running up to Nichols, who is already pinned to the ground by two other officers.

"You about to get sprayed again," the officer says as he gets to the scene. Then he pepper-sprays Nichols in the face, and Nichols screams in pain. "Mom!" Nichols yells, shielding his face. "Give me your hands boy," another officer says.

After the spray, the two other officers punch Nichols in the stomach and head. "Give me your f---ing hands," one officer says. "I'll spray your a-- again."

Three other officers alternate punching Nichols in the face and corralling his hands to handcuff him. One officer punches Nichols in the head from behind while he's handcuffed. The officers then take him to the ground.

The officer is completely out of breath and steps away from the altercation before turning back to Nichols, who is on the ground five feet away, pinned down by two officers.

"Watch out, I'm going to baton the f--- out of you," he says as the other officers move aside. The officers continuing yelling, "give me your hands. Give me your hands, motherf---er." Nichols is moaning in response.

As the dust settles, and Nichols is pinned to the ground by multiple officers, other arriving officers come into view of the video, appearing to gear up to take some swings of their own.

"That motherf---er made me spray myself," one officer can be heard saying.

The officer turns away. He walks away and says to another officer, "Let me get my car quick."

Video 4: Body-cam footage captures audio of Nichols screaming for his mother

The fourth video briefly shows footage of the beating, with the body camera apparently knocked off moments after the confrontation began.

It shows Nichols on the ground, yelling "No!" as multiple officers surround him.

With the video obscured, the footage instead captures distressing audio: Nichols screaming for his mother, again and again.

Officers are heard demanding he give them his hands, or lie on the ground. For a time, the audio captures only the sound of someone heavily breathing.

When the camera is apparently picked up, it provides for the first time a clear image of the scene: At least five officers standing in the area, one of them shining a flashlight. The beam of light illuminates Nichols's face as he sits, propped up against a car, his hands behind his back.

Blood is visible around his mouth.

Officers are heard comparing notes on their use of force. One officer is heard saying that officers fired pepper spray and deployed a Taser. Another says that Nichols reached for another officer's gun.

Officers can be heard discussing their chase of Nichols and appearing winded. At least one officer complains about his leg hurting. An officer says Nichols appears to be "on something."

In the background, while the officers talk, Nichols, who has been leaning against a car, is seen toppling over to the ground.

"Hey, sit up, bro," the officer wearing the body camera appears to say.

The officer approaches Nichols and appears to lift him up. When he does, the light captures Nichols's face and again shows blood around his mouth. It is unclear whether he is conscious or not.

What the videos don't show

In an interview with The Post, Memphis Police Chief Cerelyn Davis said there's a gap in the video record her department is releasing: Authorities don't have any video footage of the initial traffic stop.

The officer who initially stopped Nichols was driving a brand-new unmarked car that was not equipped with dashboard cameras, Davis said. The unit is assigned patrol cars, but they have the option to drive unmarked cars if they're carrying out surveillance.

Davis said she doesn't know why the officer was in an unmarked car, or how the initial encounter between Nichols and the officer unfolded.

When the video begins, "this officer and the other officer that joined were already ramped up about Mr. Nichols in his car," Davis said. "If something did happen we don't know what it was. They allege that he was driving on the wrong side of the road but we have not been able to prove that."

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HEADLINE	01/27 Wagner brutality: Russia edge in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-wagner-group-yevgeny-prigozhin-803da2e3ceda5dace7622cac611087fc
GIST	<p>Fierce battles in eastern Ukraine have thrown a new spotlight on Russia's Wagner Group, a private military company led by a rogue millionaire with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>Wagner has spearheaded the push to jump-start Russia's stalemated offensive in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk province. The ferocious house-to-house fighting has produced some of the bloodiest encounters since Russia sent troops into Ukraine, with Wagner personnel "marching on the bodies of their own soldiers" as Ukrainian authorities put it.</p> <p>The U.S. this week expanded sanctions against Wagner for its role in Ukraine and mercenary activities in Africa.</p> <p>Here is a look at the Wagner Group's history and its current role in the fighting.</p> <p>WHO OWNS THE WAGNER GROUP?</p>

[Yevgeny Prigozhin](#), who received a 12-year prison term in 1981 on charges of robbery and assault, started a restaurant business in St. Petersburg following his release from prison. It was in this capacity that he got to know Putin, who served as the city's deputy mayor in the 1990s.

Prigozhin, 61, used his ties with Putin to develop a catering business and won lucrative Russian government contracts that earned him the nickname of "Putin's chef." He later expanded to other businesses, including media outlets and an infamous "troll factory" that led to his indictment in the U.S. for meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Prigozhin denied any link to the Wagner Group before he acknowledged owning the company in September. This month, he declared he also founded, led and financed it.

WHERE HAS WAGNER WORKED?

The Wagner Group was first spotted in action in eastern Ukraine soon after a separatist conflict erupted there in April 2014, weeks after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

While backing the separatist insurgency in the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, Russia denied sending its own weapons and troops there despite ample evidence to the contrary. Engaging private contractors in the fighting allowed Moscow to maintain a degree of deniability.

Prigozhin's company was called Wagner after the nickname of its first commander, Dmitry Utkin, a retired lieutenant colonel of the Russian military's special forces.

It soon established a reputation for its extreme brutality and ruthlessness.

Along with Ukraine, Wagner personnel deployed to Syria, where Russia supported President Bashar Assad's government in the country's civil war. [In Libya](#), they fought alongside forces of Libyan commander Khalifa Hifter.

The group also has operated in the Central African Republic and Mali.

Prigozhin has reportedly used Wagner's deployment to Syria and African countries to secure lucrative mining contracts.

U.S. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Thursday that the company was using its access to gold and other resources in Africa to fund its operations in Ukraine.

Some Russian media have alleged Wagner's involvement in [the July 2018 killings of three Russian journalists](#), who were shot dead in the Central African Republic while investigating the group's activities there. The slayings remain unsolved.

WHAT IS THE GROUP'S REPUTATION?

Western countries and United Nations experts have accused Wagner Group mercenaries of committing numerous human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in the Central African Republic, Libya and Mali.

In December 2021, [the European Union accused](#) the group of "serious human rights abuses, including torture and extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and killings," and of carrying out "destabilizing activities" in the Central African Republic, Libya, Syria and Ukraine.

Some of the reported incidents stood out in their grisly brutality.

A 2017 video posted online showed a group of armed people, reported to be Wagner contractors, torturing a Syrian man, beating him to death with a sledgehammer and cutting his head before mutilating and then

burning his body. Russian authorities ignored requests by the media and rights activists to investigate the killing.

In November 2022, another video surfaced online that showed a former Wagner contractor getting beaten to death with a sledgehammer after he allegedly fled to the Ukrainian side and was recaptured. Despite public outrage and a stream of demands for an investigation, the Kremlin turned a blind eye to it.

WHAT IS WAGNER'S ROLE IN UKRAINE?

The Wagner Group has taken an increasingly visible role in the war in Ukraine as regular Russian troops suffered heavy attrition and lost control over some previously captured territory in a series of humiliating setbacks.

Prigozhin claimed full credit this month for capturing the Donetsk region salt-mining town of Soledar and accused the Russian Defense Ministry of trying to steal Wagner's glory. He said Wagner was spearheading the attack on the city of Bakhmut, a nearby Ukrainian stronghold that Russian forces have tried to win for months.

Prigozhin has toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising inmates pardons if they survived a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner. He recently posted a video in which he congratulates the first group of convicts that received official pardons and the right to leave the company.

The U.S. estimates Wagner has about 50,000 personnel fighting in Ukraine, including 10,000 contractors and 40,000 of the convicts the company enlisted.

The U.S. assesses that Wagner is spending about \$100 million a month in the fight and has taken delivery of weapons from North Korea, including rockets and missiles.

WHAT DO RUSSIA'S MILITARY BRASS THINK?

Wagner's reach for North Korean weapons may reflect its long-running spat with the Russian military leadership, which dates back to the company's creation.

A group of troops purported to be Wagner contractors on the front line in Ukraine recently recorded a video in which they showered the chief of the Russian military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, with curses for an alleged failure to provide ammunition.

[Prigozhin himself castigated the top military brass in recent months](#), accusing top-ranking officers of incompetence. His remarks were unprecedented for Russia's tightly-controlled political system, in which only Putin could air such criticism.

Earlier this month, Putin reaffirmed his trust in Gen. Gerasimov by putting him in direct charge of the Russian forces in Ukraine, a move that some observers also interpreted as an attempt to cut Prigozhin down to size.

Prigozhin somewhat toned down his harangues against the military leadership after that, but remained defiant.

He also has increasingly raised his public profile, issuing daily messaging app statements to boast about Wagner's purported victories and sardonically mock his enemies.

Asked recently about a media comparison of him with Grigory Rasputin, a mystic who gained fatal influence over Russia's last czar by claiming to have the power to cure his son's hemophilia, Prigozhin snapped: "I don't stop blood, but I spill blood of the enemies of our Motherland."

HAS WAGNER BEEN SUBJECTED TO WESTERN SANCTIONS?

The U.S. slapped several waves of sanctions on Prigozhin and Wagner. The Treasury Department [further ramped up sanctions](#) against Wagner and affiliated companies and individuals on Thursday.

The European Union also has sanctioned Prigozhin and in December 2021 [imposed sanctions](#) on several people associated with Wagner and three Russia-based energy companies linked to the group in Syria. Prigozhin mocked the Western sanctions.

“We have conducted an internal check to look into alleged crimes by Wagner but found no incriminating evidence,” he said, commenting on the latest U.S. round.

He challenged Wagner’s accusers to send proof of wrongdoing to his press service.

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HEADLINE	01/27 Timeline: traffic stop then 9 hits in 4minutes
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/us/live-news/tyre-nichols-memphis-news-1-27-23/index.html
GIST	<p><i>Editor's note: This post contains graphic descriptions of violence.</i></p> <p>City officials on Friday evening released more than an hour of footage showing the deadly confrontation between Tyre Nichols and Memphis police officers earlier this month. The released materials included three body camera videos and one overhead surveillance video.</p> <p>The five officers involved in the arrest were fired after an internal investigation and are facing criminal charges, including second-degree murder. Following the release of the video Friday night, two deputies with the Shelby County Sheriff’s Office have been put on leave pending an investigation, Sheriff Floyd Bonner Jr. said in a statement.</p> <p>According to the footage, the incident starts to unfolds from 8:24 p.m. CT, when officers initially stopped Nichols, to 9:02 p.m. CT, when an ambulance finally appears on camera to take Nichols to the hospital.</p> <p>All times are approximate, but here's a look at the timeline in the video:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8:24 p.m.: The body camera worn by an officer shows the first contact police have with Nichols on Jan. 7. Multiple officers can be seen approaching Nichols’ vehicle, drawing their firearms and yelling for Nichols to get out of the vehicle. “You’re gonna get your head blown the fuck up,” one officer yells. Nichols is pulled from the car and forced to the ground amid aggressive shouting and threats of being tasered. “I’m just trying to go home,” Nichols says. “I’m not doing anything.”• 8:25 p.m.: One officer sprays Nichols in the face with pepper spray. Nichols then struggles to his feet and begins running from the officer as one another shoots a taser at him that apparently didn’t make contact. Seven minutes later, another group of police officers announce over the radio that they see Nichols and begin to pursue him on foot.• 8:32p.m.: From body-worn camera footage, two officers can be seen on top of Nichols. Nichols is trying to speak but one of the officers tells him to “shut the fuck up.” Officers continue to hit and spray Nichols, struggling with him on the ground and telling him to give them his hands. Nichols keeps yelling “mom.”• 8:34 p.m.: One officer tells the other police officers to “watch out,” then pulls out a collapsible police baton and yells at Nichols, “I’m going to baton the fuck out of you. Give me your fucking hands.” A police surveillance camera mounted high up on a pole captured the officer hitting Nichols multiple times with the baton. Nichols struggled back to his feet as he was being hit with the baton. Footage shows the officers continue to try to pull Nichols to the ground, punching him in the face repeatedly before Nichols falls back to his knees. Two officers can be seen on top of Nichols as he lays flat on the ground.• 8:36 p.m.: More officers run onto the scene and two officers kick Nichols. A minute later the officers finally move away from Nichols, who continues to lay on the ground, writhing occasionally, with his hands behind his back.• 8:38 p.m.: The officers eventually drag Nichols and prop him against a police car, occasionally flashing their flashlights on him as they mill about the area. Two officers fist-bump a minute later. At times, Nichols slumps over on his side on the ground.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8:41 p.m.: Two medical personnel with equipment arrive at the scene. In body worn camera footage, one person can be heard saying, “It’s going to be a while for an ambulance.” Footage shows that 21 minutes pass from when paramedics appear to arrive at 8:41 p.m. to when an ambulance finally pulls into view of the camera at 9:02 p.m.
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HEADLINE	01/28 Jerusalem synagogue attack leaves 7 dead
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/28/middleeast/jerusalem-shooting-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Two people were wounded in a shooting attack in Jerusalem on Saturday, emergency services say, the day after a gunman killed at least seven people near a synagogue in the city.</p> <p>The two men injured in the City of David area of Jerusalem on Saturday, one aged 22 and one in his 40s, are father and son, according to police. A 13-year-old who police say shot and wounded the pair was “neutralized and injured” by “two passers-by carrying licensed weapons.”</p> <p>Tensions in Israel and the Palestinian territories remain high after Friday’s shooting, which police chief Yaakov Shabtai described as “one of the worst terror attacks in the past few years.” The shooter in that attack was also later killed by police forces, according to police.</p> <p>“As a result of the shooting attack, the death of 7 civilians was determined and 3 others were injured with additional degrees of injury,” police said.</p> <p>Five of the shooting victims were pronounced dead at the scene, Israel’s Magen David Adom (MDA) emergency rescue service said: four men and a woman. Five people were transported to hospitals, where another man and woman were declared dead. Among the wounded is a 15-year-old boy, the MDA said.</p> <p>The attack occurred around 8:15 p.m. local time on Friday, near a synagogue on Neve Yaakov Street, according to a police statement.</p> <p>Shabtai said the gunman “started shooting at anyone that was in his way. He got in his car and started a killing spree with a pistol at short range.” He then fled the scene in a vehicle and was killed after a shootout with police forces, police said.</p> <p>Police identified the gunman as a 21-year-old resident of East Jerusalem, saying in a statement that he appeared to have acted alone. East Jerusalem is a predominantly Palestinian area of the city, which was captured by Israel in 1967.</p> <p>Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged people against revenge attacks on Friday night. “I call on the people not to take the law into their own hands. For that purpose we have an army, police and security forces. They act and will act according to the cabinet instructions,” he said.</p> <p>Friday’s incident came one day after the deadliest day for Palestinians in the West Bank in over a year, according to CNN records.</p> <p>On Thursday, Israeli forces killed nine Palestinians and wounded several others in the West Bank city of Jenin, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, prompting the Palestinian Authority to suspend security coordination with Israel. A tenth Palestinian was killed that day in what Israel Police called a “violent disturbance” near Jerusalem.</p> <p>Overnight, on Friday morning local time, Israel launched air strikes on the Gaza strip after rockets were fired towards Israel.</p> <p>Israel’s controversial National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir visited the scene of the attack on Friday evening, telling people who were chanting angrily that “it cannot continue like this.”</p>

	<p>“I can tell you, [the people chanting] you are right. The burden is on us. It cannot continue like this,” Ben Gvir, who also leads the far-right Jewish Power party, said.</p> <p>Some people on the scene were chanting support for Ben Gvir, saying “You are our voice, we support you.”</p> <p>CNN’s Hadas Gold and team, who were also at the scene of Friday night’s shooting, heard what sounded like celebratory gunfire and car horns honking from the nearby predominantly Palestinian neighborhood of Beit Hanina.</p> <p>The White House condemned the “heinous terror attack” at a synagogue in Jerusalem on Friday and said the United States government has extended its “full support” to Israel, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement.</p> <p>The US State Department also condemned the “apparent terrorist attack” in Jerusalem “in the strongest terms.”</p> <p>“This is absolutely horrific,” said State Department Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel. “Our thoughts, prayers and condolences go out to those killed and injured in this heinous act of violence.”</p> <p>Patel said no change to the schedule of Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s upcoming trip to Egypt, Israel and the West Bank was expected.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 SKorea: 5 Russian men stranded at airport
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/27/world/russia-men-conscription-refugees-incheon-airport-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>Five Russian men who fled the country after Moscow’s military mobilization order last September have been stranded at South Korea’s Incheon International Airport for months after authorities refused to accept them.</p> <p>Three of the men had arrived in October, with the remaining two in November, said their lawyer Lee Jong-chan.</p> <p>Lee said that their applications for refugee status were denied by the South Korean Justice Ministry – leaving them stranded at the departure area for months while awaiting a ruling on their appeal. “They are provided with one meal a day, which is lunch,” Lee told CNN. “But for the rest of the day they live off bread and drinks.”</p> <p>The men are able to shower but have to wash their clothes by hand and are unable to leave the departure and duty-free areas, he added.</p> <p>“They have limited access to medical care (and) no support for their mental health which is important considering their precarious situation,” he said.</p> <p>The “partial mobilization” of Russian citizens to fight in the country’s war on Ukraine generated angry protests and prompted a mass exodus when it was announced last September. Many scrambled across land border crossings or bought air tickets out of the country.</p> <p>Collective data showed that more than 200,000 people fled Russia for Georgia, Kazakhstan and the European Union in the first week after mobilizations were announced.</p> <p>“I don’t support what’s going on so I just decided that I had to leave right away,” one man who left for Belarus previously told CNN.</p>

“It feels bad because a lot of my friends, a lot of people don’t support the war and they feel threatened by what is going on, and there is no democratic way to really stop this, to even declare your protest,” the man had said.

Men up to the age of 60 with no criminal record are eligible for military conscription. Prior military experience is not always required.

Soldiers who refuse to fight and return to the front line are reportedly held in basements in occupied Ukrainian territory and face charges of desertion, according to their families.

Only those convicted of sex crimes against minors, treason, spying or terrorism are exempted from conscription.

South Korea’s Ministry of Justice has dismissed the men’s applications as “not being worthy of evaluation” – on the grounds that refusal of conscription was not a reason for refugee recognition, according to their lawyer Lee.

Their refusal to serve in the Russian military “should be recognized as a political reason” considering that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was “condemned by international law,” Lee said.

Rights groups have called on the South Korean government to accept the men as refugees.

“Those who apply for refugee status upon escaping political and religious persecution from their home countries have rights to protection under international law,” read a statement from a South Korean rights advocacy group. It was highly likely that the men would be “detained or forcibly drafted” if they returned home, the group added.

“They are political refugees who face persecution.”

The men have appealed the decision and three of them are set to face their first ruling on January 31 – during which a court will decide if their case is “worthy of evaluation,” Lee their lawyer said.

If the court rules in their favor, the Justice Ministry will then have to review the men’s applications for refugee status.

Military conscription is a sensitive issue in South Korea, where military service is mandatory for all able bodied men between the ages of 18 and 35.

Not even the country’s athletes or K-pop superstars are exempted from military service. Conscientious objection, which was illegal for decades, was not allowed until a landmark ruling in 2018. However, religious groups have continued to voice concerns about forms of “alternative service” that involve working in correctional facilities for three years.

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HEADLINE	01/27 Court releases video Paul Pelosi attack
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/27/us/politics/paul-pelosi-attack-video.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — A police officer arrives at the front door of Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s home in San Francisco in the predawn hours of Oct. 28, 2022, to find her husband Paul Pelosi, 82, and an intruder standing together calmly but awkwardly in the foyer, each clutching opposite ends of a hammer.</p> <p>Within seconds, the tense quiet is shattered: Ordered to drop the hammer, the intruder briefly scuffles with Mr. Pelosi before raising the tool above his head and lunging toward Mr. Pelosi. Panicked officers rush inside to try to subdue the assailant, as Mr. Pelosi lies motionless on his side making guttural sounds.</p>

The graphic and harrowing scene unfolds in a roughly 90-second clip of police body camera footage released on Friday by a San Francisco court in the trial of David DePape, the man who has been charged with assaulting Mr. Pelosi. The speaker's husband would go on to [spend six days in a San Francisco hospital](#) and undergo surgery for a skull fracture. It was an extraordinary depiction of a brutal act of political violence, which stemmed from an attempt to abduct Ms. Pelosi, who at the time was second in line to the presidency.

Together with surveillance video from the Capitol Police and other evidence released on Friday, it raised fresh questions about what is being done to protect public officials and their families against escalating threats. Its release also underscored the pernicious influence of misinformation in the United States, where some influential voices on the right had spread conspiracy theories about the attack on Mr. Pelosi.

The body camera video and separate surveillance footage from outside the home that captured the minutes before Mr. DePape gained access to the Pelosi home disproved groundless claims [circulated on the far right and amplified at all levels of Republican politics](#) that the assault was an inside job or a cover story for a sordid situation involving Mr. Pelosi.

But rather than quell such conspiracy theorizing, the documentary evidence only fed the cycle that began in the immediate aftermath of the attack, when former President Donald J. Trump and Republican lawmakers were among those questioning the official account.

"No matter what happens, no matter what footage we have, what documents we have, people tend to spin narratives to support their side of the story," said Nina Jankowicz, a disinformation expert. "We just see this distrust of what you can see with your own eyes over and over and over again."

Mr. DePape himself was clearly influenced to carry out the attack by right-wing conspiracy theories he learned about online. In an interview with a San Francisco detective hours after the attack, he made clear he had fully bought into lies about the 2020 election. He described Ms. Pelosi as the "leader of the pack" of lying Democrats who spent four years undermining Mr. Trump, "until they were finally able to steal the election."

The new evidence underscored the spontaneous nature of the attack. In the police interview, Mr. DePape said he had been looking for Ms. Pelosi, a political figure who for decades [has been demonized and dehumanized by Republicans](#), and that he planned to kidnap her, break her kneecaps and see her "wheeled into Congress." Ms. Pelosi was not home the night of the attack.

In a brief, emotional statement to reporters at the Capitol on Friday, Ms. Pelosi said she did not plan to view or listen to any of the footage released publicly and would not be commenting about the incident or the case again.

"I have absolutely no intention of seeing the deadly assault on my husband's life," Ms. Pelosi said. "I won't be making any more statements about this case as it proceeds, except to again thank people and inform them of Paul's progress."

When asked how he was doing, Ms. Pelosi said simply that he was "coming along."

Alongside the release of a 911 call Mr. Pelosi placed while the intruder was in the house and an interview the suspect gave in which he said he was looking for Ms. Pelosi, the material now in the public realm provides an almost complete picture of what happened during the attack and the political motivations of the attacker.

In the 911 call, Mr. Pelosi can be heard speaking calmly and choosing his words carefully, as he tries to convey to a police dispatcher that he is in danger without directly saying anything to anger the intruder, who is apparently listening in.

“There’s a gentleman here just waiting for my wife to come back, Nancy Pelosi,” Mr. Pelosi says. “She’s not going to be here for a day, so I guess I’ll have to wait.”

Eventually, Mr. DePape appears to be losing patience with Mr. Pelosi, who tells the dispatcher, “He wants me to get the hell off the phone, OK?”

The attack and subsequent release of the video come at a time when politically motivated violence is on the rise and lawmakers are deeply concerned about how to protect themselves and their families against serious threats.

“We live in dangerous times of unprecedented extremism and political violence which have no place in our democracy or in the everyday lives of elected officials and their loved ones,” Representative Hakeem Jeffries, Democrat of New York and minority leader, said on Friday.

Also released Friday was Capitol Police surveillance footage of the Pelosi residence that showed the suspect breaking into the home through a back door. The materials were released after a legal effort by a consortium of media outlets, including The New York Times.

The surveillance video shows Mr. DePape casing the house for several minutes before entering, at one point carrying two backpacks — a scene that Capitol Police officials would have seen had they been monitoring the feed from the Pelosi home the night of the attack. But Ms. Pelosi was not present at the time, and crucial minutes went by before any officer reviewed the footage.

Since the attack, many elected officials have been pressing for more protection for lawmakers and their families, and the surveillance footage was certain to amplify questions about the response of the Capitol Police.

Unlike presidents, who receive round-the-clock security provided by the Secret Service and paid for by taxpayers, including separate protection for their family members, most members of Congress receive little government-provided security, and their families seldom have any.

As speaker of the House, Ms. Pelosi had a large security detail with her at all times. But that protection does not extend to family members.

For years, Ms. Pelosi, whose speakership ended this month, has been one of the most threatened members of Congress, in part because of a coordinated effort by Republicans to target the most powerful woman in American politics. In advertisements and fund-raising appeals designed to anger, scare and animate their core supporters, they for years have portrayed Ms. Pelosi, a wealthy woman from the progressive bastion of San Francisco, as the most sinister Democratic villain of all.

The suspect, Mr. DePape, 43, faces numerous felony charges in state court, including attempted murder and assault with a deadly weapon. He also faces federal charges of attempted kidnapping of a federal officer and assault on a family member of a federal official. If convicted, he would face the possibility of life in prison. He has pleaded not guilty, and the next hearing in the case is scheduled for Feb. 23, when a trial date will be set.

Mr. Pelosi has been slowly recovering since the attack. In recent weeks, he has attended some high-profile events with his wife, including Ms. Pelosi’s portrait unveiling and the Kennedy Center Honors. At both events, he wore a hat to cover any visible head injury and a dark glove to cover the hand that had been wounded. Earlier this month, Mr. Pelosi sat in the House gallery overlooking the floor as members cast what would be their first of 15 votes to elect a new speaker. Still, Ms. Pelosi and her family members have been candid about the long road he faces before he can make a full recovery.

“He’s been out a bit because the doctor said he has to have something to look forward to, and so again, one day at a time,” Ms. Pelosi told CNN’s Chris Wallace in a recent interview. “He had wounds and all the rest

in that on his body. Those took time, but they healed. Tendons, you know all that stuff. But the head is a different thing.”

Ms. Pelosi said that with a serious head injury, “you have to be careful about movement. You have to be careful about light. You have to be careful about sound. And it just takes a while. You get very tired, but, you know, without going so further into it, but it takes, it will take probably another three or four months, according to the doctors, for him to be really himself.”

According to his daughter Alexandra Pelosi, Mr. Pelosi was never deeply political, despite being married to the most powerful Democratic operator in the country. His circle of friends included many Republicans, and he forbid the family to discuss politics at the dinner table.

But Mr. Pelosi played an invaluable behind-the-scenes role for his wife over her years leading House Democrats, a fairly unglamorous role that was on display in a recent HBO documentary about Ms. Pelosi made by Alexandra Pelosi.

Mr. Pelosi, a multimillionaire venture capitalist, took care of what his family referred to as the “business of living,” buying dish towels, doing the dishes, dealing with contractors and even shopping for his wife’s clothes, leaving her free to focus all of her energy on her work.

“He’s remained out of the limelight as much as he could,” Alexandra Pelosi said in a recent interview. “He almost got to the end without anyone knowing who he was.”

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PELOSI ATTACK REVELATIONS

[Videos, a 911 call and audio from a police interview](#) show in new detail how an intruder broke in and attacked Paul Pelosi.

HEADLINE	01/27 Sacramento-Memphis: Nichols cut own path
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/27/us/tyre-nichols-memphis-sacramento.html
GIST	<p>Before Tyre Nichols moved to Memphis — before he was brutally beaten on a Saturday night by police officers there — he lived in California, in the Sacramento area, where he hung out with a crowd of skateboarders.</p> <p>They were a pack of teenage nonconformists. “Our friend group, we were a bunch of little rebels,” said Angelina Paxton, one of Mr. Nichols’s closest friends in Sacramento. But Mr. Nichols, she said, tended to be the voice warning them away from confrontation and serious trouble.</p> <p>“If anything, he was the one in the back saying, ‘Come on, guys,’” Ms. Paxton recalled. “He was chill. He was peaceful. He was laid back.”</p> <p>Mr. Nichols, she also said, was wary, as a Black man, of the police. His social media posts show that he identified with the Black Lives Matter movement and harbored a mistrust of prevailing government and economic systems.</p> <p>And yet recently, Ms. Paxton said, Mr. Nichols had considered becoming a police officer.</p> <p>“He was talking about how maybe that would be the easiest way to change things in the system — by becoming the system,” she said.</p> <p>Mr. Nichols, 29, died in a Memphis hospital on Jan. 10, three days after he was pulled over on suspicion of reckless driving. He had fled from the officers on foot, and had apparently been running toward the home of his mother and stepfather, where he had been living.</p> <p>“All my son was trying to do was get home,” his mother, RowVaughn Wells, said at a news conference earlier this week. “He was two minutes from the house when they murdered him.”</p>

Mr. [Nichols's traumatic death](#) has shocked Memphis, and forced the capital of the old [Southern Cotton Belt](#) to reckon with a nightmare scenario that does not fit neatly into most narratives of racist violence: all five of the officers, who have been fired and indicted for crimes including second-degree murder, are Black. So is the Memphis police chief, Cerelyn J. Davis, who this week called the officers' actions "heinous, reckless and inhumane."

Mr. Nichols's life story also cut against old narratives of African American migration patterns. Decades ago, Black people left the former Confederate states in large numbers, headed for places like California in search of opportunity and the hope of greater freedom.

But for Mr. Nichols, it was California, and its high cost of living, that had begun to feel oppressive. In early 2020, Ms. Paxton said, he set out for Tennessee to find a way to make ends meet, becoming part of what scholars have called a "[New Great Migration](#)" of Black Americans back to the states of the old Confederacy.

"At least things are affordable here," Mr. Nichols wrote in a 2021 Facebook post. "OK jobs with decent pay. Cheaper registration fees. Cigarettes that aren't \$10 a pack lol."

Ms. Paxton, 28, met Mr. Nichols when they were teenagers. They were both involved with a California youth ministry called Flipt 180. "They were trying to give teenagers an outlet that wasn't the streets," she said.

She recalled how she first bonded with him in a car as they headed to a church event. She noticed that they were both wearing shocking shades of lime green. She found him to be mellow, but difficult to pin down. When he played D.J. for his friends, he played everything: country music, the rappers Lupe Fiasco and Tupac, reggae.

As they grew closer, Ms. Paxton learned that her friend's situation was complicated. He had been living with his father in Sacramento, but the father was terminally ill, and would die before Mr. Nichols was out of high school. His mother was 1,800 miles away, in Memphis. Skateboarding offered an escape.

"He was going through a lot," Ms. Paxton said. "When he skated, it's like he wasn't worried anymore. It was like nothing mattered more than when he landed that trick, you know?"

Sometime after his father died, Mr. Nichols moved in with the family of a close friend. After high school, Ms. Paxton said, he bounced around from job to job. He had a son with a woman he was in a relationship with for awhile. Pressure to move up the economic ladder was mounting.

At a certain point, Ms. Paxton said, "he spent most of the time trying to figure out what he was going to do with his life."

His move to Memphis in 2020 roughly coincided with the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic and its lockdowns. He posted online about missing California, his old friends and his son: on the child's fourth birthday, Mr. Nichols bought cupcakes in his honor, but acknowledged that he would be eating them himself.

Yet on other occasions, he celebrated the fact that he had escaped to Tennessee.

"He felt the presence of the creator out in Memphis more than he ever had," Ms. Paxton said. "I mean, the nature, the people are kind — it's just a whole different world."

Mr. Nichols was an avid amateur photographer, and his love of his new home was reflected on his [Wix page](#), where he posted images of blues clubs, local landmarks and the sun setting over the Mississippi River. "He liked to go and watch the sunset and take pictures," his mother said at a news conference in Memphis on Friday. "That was his thing."

His embrace of Tennessee was also evident from his Facebook entries. In August 2021, he posted a video of himself in a checkered shirt, ball cap and mirrored sunglasses, dancing against a backdrop of farmland to Jason Aldean's "Girl Like You."

His other posts offered a glimpse into his passions and his politics. He posted about pro football and basketball. He wrote passionately about the plight of Indigenous people and the resilience of African Americans in the face of centuries of oppression. He denounced modern-day racism, political corruption and the power of elites. He embraced conspiracy theories about chemtrails, the John F. Kennedy assassination and the AIDS epidemic.

In June 2020, the month after George Floyd's murder, he posted a drawing based on [a famous photo of Malcolm X](#) peering out of a window, armed with a rifle. Beneath it was a caption: "Because I have a Black son," it said, followed by a drawing of a heart. That same month, in a separate post, Mr. Nichols wrote that he had seen "a lot more cops" who had decided to "kneel with all the protesters" and walk alongside them "with no batons and forceful weapons."

"Humanity is SLOWLY being restored!" he wrote.

Eventually his stepfather, Rodney Wells, helped him find a job at FedEx. The company's headquarters are in Memphis, and it has long been viewed as a crucial engine for economic sustenance and mobility for Black residents across the economic spectrum. "Those jobs are like post office jobs back in the day," said State Representative Joe Towns Jr., who represents part of Memphis. "Everybody wants one."

He worked the evening shift, and would come home with his stepfather, who worked the same shift, at around 7 p.m., when his mother had home cooking waiting. Ms. Paxton said that Mr. Nichols had specific goals: to earn enough to buy a car and a house, and to be able to fly his son out to visit him. Weekends, he would skate and take photos.

On the Saturday night when he was beaten, his mother had planned to cook him sesame chicken, a favorite. When the police stopped him, she said, he was driving back from Shelby Farms, a 4,500-acre park in the heart of Memphis, where he had probably taken in the sunset.

According to an initial police statement, the officers stopped him at 8:30 p.m., and a confrontation followed. He fled, but they chased him and caught him. The statement did not mention the beating, but it did note that he complained of shortness of breath. An ambulance came and took him to the hospital in what the police described as "critical condition."

At a news conference on Monday, Ms. Wells acknowledged that it seemed like every mother in her position describes their child as good. "But my son, he actually was a good boy," she said. Ben Crump, a lawyer for the family, noted that Mr. Nichols suffered from Crohn's disease, and as a result was almost impossibly slim: six-foot-three and 145 pounds.

On Tuesday, one of Mr. Nichols's three surviving siblings, Jamal Dupree, posted to Facebook a photo of Mr. Nichols as he lay in a hospital bed with a tube in his mouth, his face swollen and bruised and resting on a bloody pillow.

In a later post, Mr. Dupree addressed his younger brother directly: "I'm sorry I wasn't there to protect you," it said.

It was accompanied by a video shot from above the cloud line, with a blazing sun on the horizon that appeared to be either rising or setting.

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HEADLINE	01/27 Memphis cops brutal beating Tyre Nichols
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2023/01/27/us/tyre-nichols-memphis#this-was-wrong-this-was-criminal-said-a-state-investigator-heres-the-latest

GIST	<p>America was shocked anew on Friday by a display of police violence caught on video, as Memphis released body camera and surveillance footage of police officers kicking and punching a 29-year-old Black man who later died. The man, Tyre Nichols, ran after being pepper sprayed by officers, but shows no signs of fighting back as the police beat him with a baton.</p> <p>“To me, that’s worse than Rodney King,” said Ed Obayashi, a police training expert and use-of-force expert, after watching the video.</p> <p>Here are the details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A New York Times analysis of the video footage found that police officers deployed an escalating spiral of physical force and gave conflicting orders, repeatedly demanding that Mr. Nichols show his hands, even as other officers held his arms behind his back while another punched him. After officers pepper sprayed and beat Mr. Nichols, they left him sitting on the ground unattended and handcuffed, and once the medics were on the scene, they stood by for more than 16 minutes without administering treatment. Here is a timeline of the lethal encounter. • Mr. Nichols, who was pulled out of his car by officers, can be heard saying, “I’m just trying to go home,” and at one point repeatedly screams, “Mom, Mom, Mom” as he is clubbed. Lawyers have said that his mother’s home was about 100 yards away from where he was beaten. Here is what we know about Mr. Nichols. • Five Memphis police officers accused of causing Mr. Nichols’s death — Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Haley, Emmitt Martin III, Desmond Mills Jr. and Justin Smith — were fired last week and charged on Thursday with murder and other crimes. The officers, who are all Black, posted bail on Friday and were released from jail. Here are the charges they face. • The sheriff of Shelby County, which includes Memphis, said that two of his deputies who were on the scene after the beating had been “relieved of duty” on Friday night, pending an investigation, after he watched the video. Earlier this week, the Memphis Fire Department said two of its employees had been relieved of duty pending an internal investigation. • Despite concern in many big cities, there was little sign of protests turning violent in Memphis or across America. Officials and the Nichols family had pleaded with the public not to let outrage spill into unrest. Here is the scene from New York.
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Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/27 Hive takedown: impact without arrests?
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/ransomware-experts-laud-hive-takedown-but-question-impact-without-arrests/
GIST	<p>The Justice Department’s splashy announcement of the takedown of the Hive ransomware group’s infrastructure on Thursday was reminiscent of other recent high-profile operations against the scourge of ransomware.</p> <p>But the details of the operation set it apart from other ransomware group takedowns in recent years. FBI Director Christopher Wray said agents with the bureau’s Tampa Field Office gained “clandestine, persistent access” to the control panel used by Hive operators seven months ago, allowing them to identify victims and offer decryption keys to more than 1,300 of them around the world while preventing at least \$130 million in ransom payments.</p> <p>Still, one notable variable was missing from the Justice Department’s announcement: arrests. Europol said four experts were deployed to “coordinate the activities on the ground,” but no arrests have been announced in any of the 12 countries involved in the operation to take down Hive.</p> <p>Attorney General Merrick Garland declined to comment, noting that the investigation was ongoing. Wray attempted to frame the lack of arrests as part of an evolution in how the FBI is approaching ransomware investigations.</p>

“More and more I think you can expect to see ... situations where impact is achieved by more than just arrests, where we’re doing things like getting keys to victims, taking down infrastructure and seizing cryptocurrency,” Wray said during a press conference Thursday.

ReliaQuest’s Mike McPherson — who led the Tampa Field Office as special agent in charge in 2021 when the Hive operation was first opened — told The Record that the lack of arrests did not detract from how noteworthy the operation was.

McPherson said the offensive actions of law enforcement made it “significant” and the capture of decryption keys a “major win for the good guys.”

“Turning the tables and hacking a ransomware group is not an activity that law enforcement normally undertakes,” he said. “Members of these criminal organizations will go to bed tonight with one eye open wondering if their networks have been penetrated and if there are agents waiting to arrest them if they dare to travel beyond their current safe havens.”

Echoes of the REvil takedown

Recorded Future ransomware expert Allan Liska said law enforcement took similar action against REvil last year after the group caused widespread damage with its attack on technology provider Kaseya. The Record is an editorially independent unit of Recorded Future.

In that operation, the FBI and an unnamed foreign government [hacked the servers of REvil](#) in the summer of 2021, hiding in its systems until U.S. Cyber Command blocked its website by hijacking its traffic.

At the time, the FBI [faced backlash](#) for withholding the decryption keys for secondary victims of the Kaseya attack, which [affected thousands of companies](#) around the world. According to The Washington Post, the FBI did not want to tip off REvil operators by handing out the decryption keys.

Liska could not recall another instance where law enforcement had such a lengthy stretch of infiltration of a ransomware group as was described on Thursday.

“The combination of extensive access and multiple law enforcement groups involved in this operation means that there has been a lot of intelligence sharing from the infrastructure infiltrated — and tracking down and arresting those outside of Russia is likely imminent,” Liska said.

Liska said members of the group “should be shitting themselves right now” because there may be many other operations similar to this going on concurrently.

“The law enforcement agencies may not be able to arrest you but they can find out a whole lot about you. Even in Russia,” he said.

One thing that Kaseya CISO Jason Manar said stood out about the FBI’s REvil operation was the level of information released to the public, noting that he was not allowed to speak at length about the takedown, even though it pertained to his company. He compared the operation to what the bureau would do with violent gangs — finding ways to infiltrate an organization before disrupting its core methods of operation.

Former FBI Cyber Division Special Agent Austin Berglas noted that with REvil, law enforcement agencies were able to dismantle the group and arrest numerous members after getting information “from a disgruntled internal REvil source.”

But Berglas, now global head of professional services at BlueVoyant, noted that the true dismantlement of a ransomware group like Hive “only comes after law enforcement can arrest the individuals responsible.”

Cybercriminals are adept at anonymizing online communications, locations and infrastructure, and they largely operate in physical locations in the world where law enforcement cooperation is non-existent, Berglas said.

“A very temporary decline in ransomware activity in the wake of the website seizure is possible, but a website seizure does not guarantee the group’s inactivity or that arrests will be made.”

Adam Flatley, vice president of intelligence at Redacted and a member of the U.S. Ransomware Task Force, said in most cases if law enforcement had the ability to arrest individuals in a criminal gang, they would have done so prior to conducting an infrastructure takedown, which would alert the criminal organization.

The most likely scenario, according to Flatley, is that the group will suffer a short-term disruption in operations due to the loss of infrastructure, conduct an internal security review to assess damage and update security practices, “and then get back to business as soon as possible because there is just too much money to be made in ransomware extortion to sit idle for long.”

The FBI — through its Rewards for Justice program — issued a reward of up to \$10 million for any information on the whereabouts of Hive actors. On Friday morning, Russian telecommunications regulator Roskomnadzor [blocked access](#) to the U.S. State Department’s Rewards for Justice website.

The group has targeted so many healthcare institutions – [at least 28 organizations in 2021 alone](#) – that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [published a report](#) on it in an effort to help hospitals facing attack. Hive forced a California healthcare facility [to shut down last March](#) and attacked Romania’s largest oil refinery proprietor [in February](#).

The FBI [spotlighted the group](#) in August 2021 after members ransomed dozens of healthcare organizations last year.

Hive’s future

Even when ransomware groups implode in this fashion, their members typically form or join different groups.

The latest example is the Conti ransomware group, which launched several high-profile attacks on governments last year before imploding after a disgruntled member leaked internal communications. Former members are now suspected of spinning off into other groups like BlackBasta and BlackByte, Berglas said.

“If history is any indication, a reform certainly is possible, but this is only the first step in the investigation. Identification and attribution of the actual group members can be a very technical, complex, and time-consuming process,” he said.

Emsisoft ransomware expert Brett Callow said the raid “is almost certainly the end of the Hive brand” because affiliates and business partners will have lost confidence in the integrity of the operation.

But as with other operations, the people behind the ransomware strain will likely resume operations under a new brand name. That’s not to say that the FBI operation did not have value, Callow noted, explaining that any success in keeping millions of dollars out of the hands of cybercriminals is a positive development.

Law enforcement may also have collected information that allows them to eventually identify the individuals involved and help disrupt parts of the ransomware supply chain, he added.

Experts are fairly confident that the core group of Hive developers is based in Russia and likely will spin up another ransomware-as-a-service offering sooner or later.

“But, the extensive access that law enforcement appears to have means that affiliates and contractors outside of Russia should lay very low, if they are smart (which they are often not),” Liska said.

	<p>Unfortunately, the protection provided to groups like Hive in Russia makes it difficult for experts to expect any real consequences for its leaders.</p> <p>Former Obama administration cybersecurity official Tom Kellermann said the protection racket that exists between the cybercrime cartels and the Russian regime “endows them with untouchable status from Western law enforcement.”</p> <p>“We must recognize that the majority of the proceeds from ransomware allow for Russia to offset economic sanctions,” said Kellermann, who is now a senior vice president at Contrast Security.</p> <p>Because the ransomware underground is highly centralized in Eastern Europe, a relatively small number of groups are responsible for a majority of attacks.</p> <p>The top-heavy nature of the ecosystem means that disruptive action like what was announced on Thursday has a significant impact overall, according to Abnormal Security’s Crane Hassold.</p> <p>He theorized that those involved may pivot to other brands of cybercriminal activity, including business email compromise.</p> <p>“Business email compromise is the most financially impactful cyberthreat today and, instead of using their initial access malware to gain a foothold on a company’s network, they could simply reconfigure the malware to establish access to employee mailboxes, which could lead to more scaled and sophisticated vendor email compromise attacks,” he said.</p> <p>Satnam Narang, senior research engineer at Tenable, said Hive affiliates are typically responsible for conducting most of the group’s attacks and can easily pivot to other affiliate programs of groups that remain operational.</p> <p>Narang theorized that one ramification of the FBI operation may be ransomware groups lessening their reliance on leak sites as a way to stay under the radar.</p> <p>While Hive’s reputation may be damaged beyond repair, the operation is unlikely to put a significant dent in the proliferation of ransomware globally.</p> <p>“The takedown of the Hive network will not directly impact the numerous other criminal ransomware groups operating across the globe,” McPherson said, “but it does send a strong message,”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Latvia: phishing attack ministry of defense
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/latvia-confirms-phishing-attack-on-ministry-of-defense-linking-it-to-russian-hacking-group/
GIST	<p>The Russian cyber-espionage group known as Gamaredon may have been behind a phishing attack on Latvia’s Ministry of Defense last week, the ministry told The Record on Friday.</p> <p>Hackers sent malicious emails to several employees of the ministry, pretending to be Ukrainian government officials. The attempted cyberattack was unsuccessful, the ministry added.</p> <p>The sample of the malicious email was first shared on Twitter by French cybersecurity company Sekoia.io this week.</p> <p>The company obtained it from VirusTotal, a Google-owned service that analyzes suspicious files, where one of the targeted users may have downloaded it to verify its sender, according to Sekoia threat intelligence researcher Felix Aime.</p>

	<p>Researchers attributed this phishing campaign to Gamaredon because the hackers used the same domain (admou[.]org) as previous cyberattacks, Aime said. Earlier in December, the cybersecurity company Unit 42 also linked this domain to Gamaredon.</p> <p>A spokesperson for Latvia's Ministry of Defense confirmed that the latest attack was "most likely" linked to Gamaredon, although the investigation is still ongoing.</p> <p>According to the Latvian computer emergency response team, CERT-LV, the attack was "unusual" because the Russian hackers communicated with researchers in the final stages of the attack when they learned they were being investigated.</p> <p>A CERT-LV spokesperson told The Record that hackers sent a meme depicting a Russian bear holding a paw on Ukraine, while the U.S. and EU try to contain it.</p> <p>Hacker groups tied to the Russian government, including Gamaredon, have targeted Latvian organizations for several years, but their activity rapidly increased since the start of the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Most cyberattacks by pro-Russian hackers "achieve nothing more than publicity," Varis Teivans, the deputy manager of CERT-LV told The Record in an interview in October.</p> <p>Latvia has supported Ukraine since the beginning of the war, providing weapons, humanitarian aid and shelter for Ukrainian refugees.</p> <p>Other Ukrainian allies, especially former Soviet Union members including Estonia and Lithuania, are also reporting an increase in cyberattacks.</p> <p>Ukraine's CERT told The Record that Gamaredon is responsible for the largest number of cyberattacks on Ukraine. "Not a week went by that we didn't detect some new mass phishing email campaign with Gamaredon malware," a CERT-UA spokesperson said.</p> <p>In 2022, Ukraine registered more than 70 incidents related to this group, according to CERT-UA.</p> <p>Ukraine claims that Gamaredon operates from the city of Sevastopol in Russia-occupied Crimea, but acts on orders from the FSB Center for Information Security in Moscow. The group began operations in June 2013, just months before Russia forcibly annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine.</p> <p>Ukrainian cybersecurity officials described Gamaredon's attacks as intrusive and audacious, and said the group's main purpose was "to conduct targeted cyberintelligence operations."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Racial slurs in Yandex source code
SOURCE	https://cyberscoop.com/racial-slurs-discovered-in-leaked-yandex-source-code/
GIST	<p>Russian tech giant Yandex apologized on Friday for racial slurs uncovered in the company's source code. The apology came in response to the discovery of multiple references to the N-word in the company's code base after it leaked online. "We deeply regret that this word ever appeared in our internal codes," the Yandex press office told CyberScoop in an email Friday.</p> <p>A researcher who goes by the name "Wacky Fruit" on Twitter posted screenshots Thursday showing the use of the word in multiple places. "Yandex, R U F*** serious?!", they tweeted.</p> <p>According to the Yandex press office, the code in question appears "to be old fragments differing from the current version of the company's repository and would never have affected any of the company's services." The company called the incident a "blatant violation of our corporate ethics" and said it is conducting a review to understand "how this happened" and to take measures to "to ensure this does not happen again."</p>

	<p>A link to the repositories containing Yandex code totaling nearly 50 gigabytes was posted to a popular hacked database forum Thursday. The leaked files date to Feb. 24, 2022 — the day of the Russian invasion of Ukraine — and contain source code for almost all of the company’s major services, but no user data, the researcher Arseniy Shestakov wrote on his personal website Thursday.</p> <p>Yandex is one of the biggest technology companies in Russia, offering a wide array of services such as search, maps, email, delivery on demand, voice assistance and autonomous vehicles, among other things. “Within country it provide wider range of services than Google,” Shestakov wrote on his blog. “Imagine one company that replace Google, Uber, Amazon, Netflix and Spotify.”</p> <p>Grigory Bakunov, a former Yandex systems administrator and developer, told Bleeping Computer that the motive of the data leak was political, given that the date on the files and that the person who posted it had apparently not tried to sell it to competitors. Bakunov also said that although the company says the code is not the current version, “it might be up to 90% similar.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Realtek vulnerability under attack
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/realtek-vulnerability-under-attack-134.html
GIST	<p>Researchers are warning about a spike in exploitation attempts weaponizing a critical remote code execution flaw in Realtek Jungle SDK since the start of August 2022.</p> <p>According to Palo Alto Networks Unit 42, the ongoing campaign is said to have recorded 134 million exploit attempts as of December 2022, with 97% of the attacks occurring in the past four months.</p> <p>Close to 50% of the attacks originated from the U.S. (48.3%), followed by Vietnam (17.8%), Russia (14.6%), The Netherlands (7.4%), France (6.4%), Germany (2.3%), and Luxembourg (1.6%).</p> <p>What's more, 95% of the attacks leveraging the security shortcoming that emanated from Russia singled out organizations in Australia.</p> <p>"Many of the attacks we observed tried to deliver malware to infect vulnerable IoT devices," Unit 42 researchers said in a report, adding "threat groups are using this vulnerability to carry out large-scale attacks on smart devices around the world."</p> <p>The vulnerability in question is CVE-2021-35394 (CVSS score: 9.8), a set of buffer overflows and an arbitrary command injection bug that could be weaponized to execute arbitrary code with the highest level of privilege and take over affected appliances.</p> <p>The issues were disclosed by ONEKEY (previously IoT Inspector) in August 2021. The vulnerability impacts a wide range of devices from D-Link, LG, Belkin, ASUS, and NETGEAR.</p> <p>Unit 42 said it discovered three different kinds of payloads distributed as a result of in-the-wild exploitation of the flaw -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A script executes a shell command on the targeted server to download additional malware • An injected command that writes a binary payload to a file and executes it, and • An injected command that directly reboots the targeted server to cause a denial-of-service (DoS) condition <p>Also delivered through the abuse of CVE-2021-35394 are known botnets like Mirai, Gafgyt, and Mozi, as well as a new Golang-based distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) botnet dubbed RedGoBot.</p> <p>First observed in September 2022, the RedGoBot campaign involves dropping a shell script that's designed to download a number of botnet clients tailored to different CPU architectures. The malware, once launched, is equipped to run operating system commands and mount DDoS attacks.</p>

	<p>The findings once again underscore the importance of updating software in a timely fashion to avoid exposure to potential threats.</p> <p>"The surge of attacks leveraging CVE-2021-35394 shows that threat actors are very interested in supply chain vulnerabilities, which can be difficult for the average user to identify and remediate," the researchers concluded. "These issues can make it difficult for the affected user to identify the specific downstream products that are being exploited."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Critical flaw impacts Lexmark printers
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/critical-vulnerability-impacts-over-120-lexmark-printers/
GIST	<p>Printer and imaging products manufacturer Lexmark this week published a security advisory to warn users of a critical vulnerability impacting over 120 printer models.</p> <p>The issue, tracked as CVE-2023-23560 (CVSS score of 9.0), is described as a server-side request forgery (SSRF) flaw in the Web Services feature of newer Lexmark devices, which could be exploited to execute arbitrary code.</p> <p>“Successful exploitation of this vulnerability can lead to an attacker being able to remotely execute arbitrary code on a device,” Lexmark warns in an advisory (PDF).</p> <p>The manufacturer lists roughly 125 device models that are impacted by the security defect, including B, C, CS, CX, M, MB, MC, MS, MX, XC, and XM series printers.</p> <p>The company has announced firmware updates that resolve the vulnerability on all impacted devices and encourages users to find update instructions on its support website.</p> <p>Additionally, Lexmark says that exploitation of CVE-2023-23560 can be blocked by disabling the Web Services feature on the vulnerable printers (TCP port 65002).</p> <p>To block TCP port 65002, users would have to go to <i>Settings > Network/Ports > TCP/IP > TCP/IP Port Access</i>, uncheck TCP 65002 (WSD Print Service), and then click Save.</p> <p>Lexmark also warns that, while it is not aware of any malicious attacks targeting the vulnerability, proof-of-concept (PoC) code exploiting it has been made public.</p> <p>Given that it is not unusual for threat actors to target unpatched printers and other Internet of Things (IoT) devices, users are advised to apply the available patches as soon as possible.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Yandex source code online leaked
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/yandex-source-code-hacked-leaked/
GIST	<p>The source code repository of the Yandex search engine and technology giant was leaked as a torrent, containing over 1,900 factors for ranking search results. The company, also called Russian Google, had the data leaked on Brached Forums, a hacker forum that surfaced as an alternative to the popular and now-seized Raidforums.</p> <p>The incident should not come as a surprise, since Yandex or its products are often under cyber attack. In 2016, Hackread.com exclusively reported on how a dark web vendor was selling 6.3 million Yandex user account data.</p> <p>In September 2021, the Russian search engine giant was hit by one of the largest DDoS attacks powered by 200,000 compromised IoT devices.</p> <p>What was Leaked?</p>

The leaker has shared a magnet link containing 44.7GB of files linked to Yandex git sources. The files were allegedly stolen from Yandex in July 2022. Apart from containing anti-spam guidelines, the code repositories are believed to have Yandex's source code.

The leak revealed around 1,922 ranking factors the search engine uses in its search algorithm. The code was leaked as a torrent. Per the [analysis](#) posted by Twitter user Alex Buraks, the leaked data includes numerous ranking factors, including text relevancy, PageRank, content age, freshness, etc.

Moreover, several end-user behaviour factors, link-related factors, and host reliability exist. SEOs find some unusual ranking factors, such as the number of unique visitors, average domain ranking across queries, and percent of organic traffic.

[According to](#) a data leaks investigator/researcher, Arseniy Shestakov, the leaked Yandex Git repository contained technical data and coding related to Yandex's major products such as the following:

- Yandex Taxi
- Yandex Mail
- Yandex Maps
- Yandex Market
- AI assistant Alice
- Yandex Direct Ads service
- Workspaces service Yandex360
- Cloud storage service Yandex Disk
- Travel booking service Yandex Travel
- Payment processing service Yandex Pay
- Yandex Cloud, and internet analytics solution Yandex Metrika.

Shestakov further noted some API keys, which most likely have been used to test deployment.

Yandex Denies Hacking Attempt

Yandex claims that it is aware of the leak and has already initiated an investigation to check how source code 'fragments' were exposed to the public. It is worth noting that the leak doesn't include user or employee personal data.

However, considering the significance of Yandex in Russia's IT infrastructure and leaked data, it could be assumed that the attack was motivated by the country's invasion of Ukraine. So, pro-Ukraine hackers could be involved.

In its [official statement](#), Yandex clarified that the company wasn't hacked and [a former employee](#) could be involved in leaking its source code in the public domain. Russia's leading IT firm noted that the leaked archive includes code fragments that are part of an internal repository, the data of which is different from what is used in the latest version of the repository.

"Yandex was not hacked. Our security service found code fragments from an internal repository in the public domain, but the content differs from the current version of the repository used in Yandex services," the company's statement read.

Nevertheless, source code leaks are dangerous for posing serious security issues to organizations since threat actors can observe the company's intellectual property and system data. Leaking of source code would help attackers create targeted security exploits.

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HEADLINE	01/28 SwiftSlicer: new data wiping malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-use-new-swiftslicer-wiper-to-destroy-windows-domains/

GIST	<p>Security researchers have identified a new data-wiping malware they named SwiftSlicer that aims to overwrite crucial files used by the Windows operating system.</p> <p>The new malware was discovered in a recent cyberattack against a target in Ukraine and has been attributed to Sandworm, a hacking group working for Russia's General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) as part of the Main Center for Special Technologies (GTsST) military unit 74455.</p> <p>Go-based data wiper</p> <p>While details are scant regarding SwiftSlicer at the moment, security researchers at cybersecurity company ESET say that they found the destructive malware deployed during a cyberattack in Ukraine.</p> <p>The name of the target has not been published, recent Sandworm activity includes a data-wiping attack on Ukrinform, Ukraine's national news agency.</p> <p>However, in the attack that ESET discovered on January 25 the threat actor launched a different destructive malware called CaddyWiper, previously observed in other attacks on Ukrainian targets [1, 2].</p> <p>ESET says that Sandworm launched SwiftSlicer using Active Directory Group Policy, which allows domain admins to execute scripts and commands throughout all of the devices in Windows network.</p> <p>ESET researchers say that SwiftSlicer was deployed to delete shadow copies and to overwrite critical files in the Windows system directory, specifically drivers and the Active Directory database.</p> <p>The specific targeting of the %CSIDL_SYSTEM_DRIVE%\Windows\NTDS folder indicates that the wiper is not only meant to destroy files but to also bring down the entire Windows domains.</p> <p>SwiftSlicer overwrites data using 4096 bytes blocks that are filled with randomly generated bytes. After completing the data destruction job, the malware reboots the systems, ESET researchers say.</p> <p>According to the researchers, Sandworm developed SwiftSlicer in Golang programming language, which has been adopted by multiple threat actors for its versatility, and it can be compiled for all platforms and hardware.</p> <p>Although the malware has been added to the Virus Total database only recently (submitted on January 26), it is currently detected by more than half of the antivirus engines present on the scanning platform.</p> <p>Russia's destructive malware</p> <p>In a report today, the Ukrainian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-UA) says that Sandworm also tried to use five data-destruction utilities on the Ukrinform news agency's network:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CaddyWiper (Windows) • ZeroWipe (Windows) • SDelete (legitimate tool for Windows) • AwfulShred (Linux) • BidSwipe (FreeBSD) <p>The agency's investigation revealed that SandWorm distributed the malware to computers on the network using a Group Policy Object (GPO) - a set of rules administrators use to configure operating systems, apps, and user settings in an Active Directory environment, the same method also used to execute SwiftSlicer.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Shady reward apps on Google Play
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/shady-reward-apps-on-google-play-amass-20-million-downloads/

A new category of activity tracking applications has been having massive success recently on Google Play, Android's official app store, having been downloaded on over 20 million devices.

The applications promote themselves as health, pedometer, and good habit-building apps, promising to give users random rewards for staying active in their daily lives, reaching distance goals, etc.

According to [a report by the Dr. Web antivirus](#), though, the rewards may be impossible to cash out or are only made available partially after forcing users to watch a large number of advertisements.

Three notable examples listed in Dr. Web's report are:

- **Lucky Step – Walking Tracker** – 10 million downloads
- **WalkingJoy** – 5 million downloads
- **Lucky Habit: health tracker** – 5 million downloads

Dr. Web says all three apps communicate with the same remote server address, indicating a common operator/developer. At the time of writing, all three remain available on Google Play.

The antivirus firm says the apps do not allow withdrawals before users have accumulated a significant amount of rewards. Even then, they promise to unlock "earnings" after users sit and watch a dozen advertisement videos.

Even after watching a round of ads, the apps push even more ads allegedly to "speed up" the withdrawal process.

In addition to these signs, Dr. Web reports that an earlier version of 'Lucky Step – Walking Tracker' offered the option to convert in-app rewards to gift cards that users could use for purchasing goods in actual online stores.

In recent versions of the app, however, this functionality has been removed from the options, so it's not clear what the rewards can be converted to anymore.

Some users on Google Play left reviews stating that 'Lucky Step - Waling Tracker' acts as adware, loading full-screen ads upon screen unlock, even overriding active windows.

Another example of a similar app that's still available on Google Play is 'Wonder Time,' a rewards app that has amassed 500,000 downloads.

The app promises to reward real money for completing various tasks like installing additional applications and games.

However, the tokens users receive for each action are minuscule compared to the minimum earnings withdrawal threshold set by the developer.

Phishing games

In the same report, Dr. Web warned that phishing apps disguised as investment apps and games were found on Google Play, measuring over 450,000 downloads.

The apps connect to a remote server upon launch and receive a configuration instructing them on what to do. Typically, the instructions involve loading phishing pages that request users to enter sensitive details. The malicious game apps observed by Dr. Web are the following:

- **Golden Hunt** – 100,000 downloads
- **Reflector** – 100,000 downloads
- **Seven Golden Wolf blackjack** – 100,000 downloads (still on Google Play)
- **Unlimited Score** – 50,000 downloads
- **Big Decisions** – 50,000 downloads
- **Jewel Sea** – 10,000 downloads

- **Lux Fruits Game** – 10,000 downloads
- **Lucky Clover** – 10,000 downloads
- **King Blitz** – 5,000 downloads
- **Lucky Hammer** – 1,000 downloads

If you have any of the above phishing apps installed on your Android device, you should uninstall them immediately and then run an AV scan to locate and remove any remnants.

BleepingComputer has contacted Google to ask about the safety of the applications that are still on the Play Store, and we will update this post as soon as we receive a response.

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HEADLINE	01/27 Website hackers become persistent threats
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/noob-hackers-become-persistent-threats
GIST	<p>Tracking malicious hackers' early activities using open source intelligence can offer substantial clues about the likelihood of their becoming a persistent threat in the future, two university researchers claimed in a report this week.</p> <p>That knowledge can help guide early intervention efforts to nudge fledgling hackers off their criminal trajectories, they noted.</p> <p>Christian Howell, assistant professor in the Department of Criminology at the University of South Florida, and David Maimon, a professor at Georgia State University's Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology, recently tracked 241 new hackers engaged in website defacements for a period of one year.</p> <p>Early Intervention for Fledgling Hackers</p> <p>Howell and Maimon identified hackers as new for their study based on information the individuals posted on Zone-H, a platform that malicious actors widely use to report website defacements. Hackers basically upload evidence of their attack, including their moniker, the defaced website's domain name, and an image of the defaced content to Zone-H. Once administrators there verify the content, they post the information to the archive, where it is publicly viewable. Zone-H currently maintains records of more than 15 million attacks that have resulted in website defacements over the years.</p> <p>The two researchers tracked each of the hackers for a period of 52 weeks from their first disclosed website defacement on Zone-H. Because many attackers use the same online aliases across platforms to establish their reputation and status, the researchers were able track them across multiple environments, including social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, Telegram, and YouTube.</p> <p>"Based on a hacker's behavior in the first few months of their career, you can predict where they are going to be further on in their career," Maimon says. "We can definitely nudge these actors away from a life of cybercrime," by intervening early, he adds.</p> <p>Maimon points to previous research that he was part of, along with Howell and another researcher, that showed early intervention can have an impact on budding criminal behavior. In the study, the researchers — purporting to be hackers themselves — sent direct messages to a selected group of hackers about alleged lawenforcement efforts targeting those involved in defacement activity. The messages prompted many of those who received them to cut back their defacement activity, apparently out of concern about law enforcement tracking them down, he says.</p> <p>Four Distinct Trajectories</p> <p>They collected information about the total number of attacks that each hacker carried out during the one-year period, analyzed the content of their website defacements, and gathered open source intelligence about the hackers from social media and underground sites and forums.</p>

The data showed that 241 hackers defaced a total of 39,428 websites in the first year of their malicious hacking careers. An analysis of their behavior revealed that new hackers follow one of four trajectories: low threat, natural desisting, increasingly prolific, and persistent.

A plurality of the new hackers (28.8%) fell into the low-threat category, which basically meant they engaged in very few defacements and did not increase their attack frequency through the year. Some 23.9% were naturally desisting, meaning they began their careers with substantial velocity but then appeared to lose interest quickly. Hackers in this category included politically motivated hacktivists who likely lose sight or got bored of their cause, the researchers surmised.

Hackers in the more troublesome categories were the 25.8% who engaged in an increasing number of attacks over the course of the year and the 21.5% in the persistent category who started with a substantial number of attacks and maintained that level through the year.

"Increasingly prolific hackers engage in more attacks as they advance in their career, while persistent threats continually engage in a large number of attacks. Both are problematic for system admins," Howell says. He notes that it's hard to say for sure what percentage of the hackers in the study engaged in other forms of cybercrime besides website defacements. "But I found several selling hacking services on the Dark Web. I suspect most — if not all — engage in other forms of hacking."

Telltale Signs

The two researchers found that hackers who had a high level of engagement on social media platforms and reported their website defacements to multiple archives tended to also be the more persistent and prolific actors. They also tended to disclose their aliases and ways to contact them on sites they defaced. Howell and Maimon chalked the behavior up to attempts by these actors to establish their brand as they prepared for a long-term career in cybercrime.

Often, these actors also indicated they were part of broader teams or became part of a broader group. "New hackers are typically recruited by existing teams with more sophisticated members," Howell says.

The study showed that cyber intelligence from publicly available sources is useful in forecasting both threats and emerging threat actors, Howell says. He notes that the focus now is on developing AI algorithms that can help improve these forecasts going forward.

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HEADLINE	01/27 Identity Golden Chickens malware service
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/experts-uncover-identity-of-mastermind.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity researchers have discovered the real-world identity of the threat actor behind Golden Chickens malware-as-a-service, who goes by the online persona "badbullzvenom."</p> <p>eSentire's Threat Response Unit (TRU), in an exhaustive report published following a 16-month-long investigation, said it "found multiple mentions of the badbullzvenom account being shared between two people."</p> <p>The second threat actor, known as Frapstar, is said to identify themselves as "Chuck from Montreal," enabling the cybersecurity firm to piece together the criminal actor's digital footprint.</p> <p>This includes his real name, pictures, home address, the names of his parents, siblings, and friends, along with his social media accounts and his interests. He is also said to be the sole proprietor of a small business that's run from his own home.</p> <p>Golden Chickens, also known as Venom Spider, is a malware-as-a-service (MaaS) provider that's linked to a variety of tools such as Taurus Builder, a software to create malicious documents; and More_eggs, a JavaScript downloader that's used to serve additional payloads.</p>

The threat actor's cyber arsenal has been put to use by other prominent cybercriminal groups like [Cobalt Group](#) (aka Cobalt Gang), [Evilnum](#), and [FIN6](#), all of which are estimated to have collectively caused losses totaling \$1.5 billion.

Past More_eggs campaigns, some [dating back to 2017](#), have involved [spear-phishing business professionals](#) on LinkedIn with bogus job offers that give threat actors remote control over the victim's machine, leveraging it to harvest information or deploy more malware.

Last year, in a [reversal](#) of sorts, the same tactics were employed to strike corporate hiring managers using resumes laden with malware as an infection vector.

The earliest documented record of Frapster's activity goes back to May 2015, when Trend Micro [described](#) the individual as a "lone criminal" and a luxury car enthusiast.

"'Chuck,' who uses multiple aliases for his underground forum, social media, and Jabber accounts, and the threat actor claiming to be from Moldova, have gone to great lengths to disguise themselves," eSentire researchers Joe Stewart and Keegan Keplinger said.

"They have also taken great pains to obfuscate the Golden Chickens malware, trying to make it undetectable by most AV companies, and limiting customers to using Golden Chickens for ONLY targeted attacks."

It's suspected that Chuck is one of the two threat actors operating the badbullzvenom account on the Exploit.in underground forum, with the other party possibly located in Moldova or Romania, eSentire noted.

The Canadian cybersecurity company said it further uncovered a new attack campaign targeting e-commerce companies, tricking recruiters into downloading a rogue Windows shortcut file from a website that masquerades as a resume.

The shortcut, a malware dubbed VenomLNK, serves as an initial access vector to drop More_eggs or TerraLoader, which subsequently acts as a conduit to deploy different modules, namely TerraRecon (for victim profiling), TerraStealer (for information theft), and TerraCrypt (for ransomware extortion).

"The malware suite is still actively being developed and is being and sold to other threat actors," the researchers concluded, urging organizations to be on the lookout for potential phishing attempts.

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HEADLINE	01/27 Target: data sold on darknet 'outdated'
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/target-says-data-sold-on-dark-web-is-outdated-likely-released-by-third-party/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>Following the posting of an alleged database of customer information on a hacker forum, Target is denying that the data being sold on the dark web is current and says that the information was not taken directly from its systems.</p> <p>On Thursday, the hacker posted the trove, which contains names, store addresses, and transaction information, purportedly for more than 800,000 Target customers.</p> <p>But Target spokesperson Brian Harper-Tibaldo told The Record that the data is "outdated" and "may have been released by a third party."</p> <p>"Our cybersecurity team is confident this is not a data breach and has found no malicious access to or compromise of Target's systems," he said.</p>

	<p>“In addition, the team can confirm that no current or personal guest information was included in the data disclosed by the threat actor.”</p> <p>The hacker claims in the post that the database includes information on customer purchases from pharmacies and information on RedCards – cards from the retail giant that offer customers discounts and benefits.</p> <p>The leak caps a busy month for data breaches, affecting companies like DuoLingo, Hilton Hotels, Samsung, PayPal, Nissan and more.</p> <p>A report from the Identity Theft Resource Center published this week found that 1,802 U.S. companies reported a data compromise in 2022 after 1,862 were reported the year before.</p> <p>The researchers found that more than 422 million people had their information leaked last year and 1,143 of the breaches involved people’s full Social Security numbers.</p> <p>Identity Theft Resource Center CEO Eva Velasquez said the figures are only estimates since data breach notices are “increasingly issued with less information.”</p> <p>“This has resulted in less reliable data that impairs consumers, businesses and government entities from making informed decisions about the risk of a data compromise and the actions to take if impacted by one,” she said.</p> <p>“People are largely unable to protect themselves from the harmful effects of data compromises, fueling an epidemic – a ‘scamdemic’ of identity fraud committed with compromised or stolen information.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Ukraine: Sandstorm hit news agency
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ukraine-sandworm-hackers-hit-news-agency-with-5-data-wipers/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The Ukrainian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-UA) found a cocktail of five different data-wiping malware strains deployed on the network of the country's national news agency (Ukrinform) on January 17th.</p> <p>"As of January 27, 2023, 5 samples of malicious programs (scripts) were detected, the functionality of which is aimed at violating the integrity and availability of information (writing files/disks with zero bytes/arbitrary data and their subsequent deletion)," CERT-UA said (automated translation from Ukrainian).</p> <p>The list of destructive malware deployed in the attack against Ukrinform includes CaddyWiper (Windows), ZeroWipe (Windows), SDelete (Windows), AwfulShred (Linux), and BidSwipe (FreeBSD).</p> <p>Two of the five strains, ZeroWipe and BidSwipe, are either new malware or are tracked by the Ukrainians under different names than those used by anti-malware vendors.</p> <p>The attackers launched the CaddyWiper malware using a Windows group policy (GPO), showing that they had breached the target's network beforehand.</p> <p>As CERT-UA found during the investigation, the threat actors gained remote access to Ukrinform's network around December 7th and waited more than a month to unleash the malware cocktail.</p> <p>However, their attempt to wipe out all the data on the news agency's systems failed. The wipers only managed to destroy files on "several data storage systems," which didn't impact Ukrinform's operations.</p>

"The CERT-UA emphasizes that the cyberattack was only a partial success, specifically with regard to a limited number of data storage systems," the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection (SSSCIP) of Ukraine [added](#).

Cyberattack linked to Russian Sandworm military hackers

CERT-UA linked the attack to the Sandworm threat group last week, a hacking outfit part of the Russian Military Unit 74455 of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU).

Sandworm has also used the CaddyWiper data wiper in [another failed attack](#) from April targeting a large Ukrainian energy provider.

In that attack, the Russian hackers used a similar tactic, deploying CaddyWiper to erase traces left by Industroyer ICS malware, together with three other wipers designed for Linux and Solaris systems, and tracked as Orcshred, Soloshred, and Awfulshred.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, multiple strains of data-wiping malware have been deployed on the networks of Ukrainian targets besides CaddyWiper.

This list also includes the likes of [DoubleZero](#), [HermeticWiper](#), [IsaacWiper](#), [WhisperKill](#), [WhisperGate](#), and [AcidRain](#).

Microsoft and Slovak software company ESET have also linked [recent ransomware attacks](#) targeting Ukraine to the Sandworm hacking group.

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Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	01/30 Lockerbie bomb maker in US custody
SOURCE	https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-30/alleged-bombmaker-lockerbie-pan-am-103-in-us-custody/101896192
GIST	<p>A frail-looking 71-year-old — who is a little unsteady on his feet — will be asked to enter a plea in a Washington DC court next week, charged over what's considered one of the worst terrorist attacks in US history.</p> <p>The man — known as Mas'ud — is alleged to have built and delivered the bomb that brought down Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing 270 people.</p> <p>Prosecutors say that — in a confession extracted more than 10 years ago, while he was in custody in Libya on unrelated charges — he has also admitted to setting the timer.</p> <p>Mas'ud was captured and extradited to the US last month.</p> <p>His arrest represents a moment of hope for many of the Lockerbie victims' families, who have long campaigned for justice to be done on American soil.</p> <p>The moment of the crash</p> <p>It was just after 7pm on December 21, 1988, when the sky lit up red over Lockerbie and residents heard a sound they described as a horrible howling.</p> <p>"It was like a rushing and screaming noise," one man told the television crews that rushed to the town in the following hours.</p> <p>He described how "liquid fire ... concrete and debris" had rained down on his car.</p> <p>Reverend Alan Neal — the rector of the local Anglican church — heard something "loud and terrible".</p>

He went out into the night where he met a neighbour who was "all jittery and shaky".

Soon, they came to the shocking realisation that a piece of a plane had landed about 30 or 40 metres away.

All over Lockerbie, those who hadn't been killed — because 11 people on the ground had been obliterated by the falling debris — were leaving their homes to find bodies in the streets and gardens, a huge crater in the middle of the town, and wreckage everywhere from Pan Am flight 103.

In the US city of Albany, lawyer Paul Hudson was taking a call on the office line.

His 16-year-old daughter, Melina, was returning home for Christmas after spending a term at an English school.

"A travel agent called me, who had arranged her ticket, and said that there had been an accident and Melina might have been on a plane," he told ABC's 7.30.

"I rushed home, and my wife was there, and we turned on the TV set and we saw the flames over Lockerbie.

"And, from that time forward, everything changed."

The next day, Paul was on a plane to Scotland, carrying his daughter's dental records.

Majority of victims were Americans

Kara Monetti's afternoon television watching was interrupted by a news flash about the crash.

When her mum came home a little later, she had to break the news that the plane her son, Rick, was travelling home on was missing.

Rick Monetti was one of 35 students from Syracuse University in New York state on Pan Am flight 103.

They'd all been doing an overseas exchange.

There were no survivors.

All 259 passengers and crew on the flight — and the 11 people on the ground — died.

Of the victims, 190 were Americans.

It was considered the most significant terrorist attack on America until September 11, 2001.

"For us, it was a huge deal," said Bill Barr, who was to later become attorney-general in the George HW Bush administration at a crucial time in the subsequent investigation.

In 1991, Bill Barr announced charges against two Libyan intelligence officers, Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah.

Back in 1988, the crash scene stretched over 2,000 square kilometres.

Police had walked the length and breadth of it, painstakingly searching fields for scraps of evidence.

Shreds of clothing and a fragment of a circuit board eventually led them to Malta and the conclusion that Megrahi and Fhimah had conspired to place a bomb concealed in a Toshiba tape recorder in an unaccompanied suitcase.

The suitcase made its way from Malta to Frankfurt, where it was loaded onto Pan Am flight 103, bound for Heathrow and then New York.

Bill Barr pushed in vain at the time for strong action against Libya and its then-leader, Muammar Gaddafi.

"The impulse was just to add sanctions and I thought they'd be worthless," he said.

"I thought we should strike some obvious military and intelligence targets."

The former attorney-general was also frustrated by the prosecution of the two accused, Megrahi and Fhimah.

They were tried in a special court at Camp Zeist in the Netherlands by three Scottish judges.

In 2001, Megrahi was convicted, but Fhimah was acquitted.

"We had the death penalty, and I think it's likely we would have sought the death penalty. And the Scots obviously don't have the death penalty," Mr Barr said.

"But Scotland, that was the site where the crime was committed, and they had a very strong argument it should be a Scottish case."

To add insult to injury, as far as the Americans were concerned, Megrahi was released eight years later, ostensibly on compassionate grounds because he'd been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

He arrived home to cheering crowds and a welcome by the Gaddafi family and would live for several years still, hardening suspicions among some relatives that the UK had done a deal with Libya.

Rick Monetti's sister, now Kara Weipz, was "beyond" angry.

"I think that that hero's welcome was disgusting and a slap in the face of our loved ones [who] we lost."

Mr Hudson was also "very upset" by Megrahi's release.

"The fact that he was let out much, much too early indicates to me that there are parties that perhaps don't want the full truth to come out."

'Finishing a job that I had started'

The indictment of Abu Agila Mas'ud Kheir Al-Marimi was announced in late 2020, in the closing days of the Trump administration by Bill Barr, then in his second stint as attorney-general.

"For me, it was finishing a job that I had started," he said.

"It was very rewarding for me, personally, to be able to bring those additional charges."

As the charges were announced, Ms Weipz stood next to him.

She was 15 when her older brother died, and she's dedicated much of her adult life to campaigning for truth and justice, currently heading up the organisation Victims of Pan Am Flight 103.

That there has never been a trial in the US in connection with Lockerbie is, to her, "incomplete justice" — so Mas'ud's arrest is "huge".

"It's probably one of the most-significant moments in my life," she said.

Ms Weipz is still working out how she feels about having seen the alleged bomb-maker shuffling into court last week for his pre-arraignment hearing.

When she was younger, she tried to let go of a lot of her anger, but in court, it came back.

"I definitely did have some anger today."

Families hoping to find peace

Mr Hudson is "cautiously hopeful" that Mas'ud will be convicted, but the circumstances surrounding his alleged confession and extradition weigh on his mind.

"One of my concerns is that there may not be enough legally admissible evidence to convict him in a US court," Mr Hudson explained

He will follow as much of the trial, if it goes ahead, as he can in person.

No stranger to Washington, DC, for decades Mr Hudson was a regular guest on Capitol Hill as he devoted himself to advocacy work, lobbying lawmakers after the Lockerbie bombing for improved airline safety and accountability, and for more passenger rights.

He came to court last month, too, when Mas'ud appeared at an initial hearing after his extradition.

However, he didn't come to last week's hearing, because he had a house guest: Reverend Alan Neal, now 95 years old.

The two men formed a lifelong friendship in the aftermath of the Lockerbie disaster.

Ms Weipz, too, has maintained strong bonds with Lockerbie and its people.

She took her three boys there for the first time last summer and she wears a bracelet with Lockerbie's coordinates imprinted on it.

"Lockerbie is just such a sweet town. It is an unassuming town," she said.

"I mean, there's sad memories there, of course, but it's not a sad place. It's a very lively little town.

"To me, it just feels like home."

Ms Weipz will also be watching the Mas'ud case closely.

She hopes the case will bring more information to light about who else might have been involved.

That would help bring peace, she thinks, to the families.

Does she hope for remorse if he's found guilty?

"I think in some ways that might be asking for too much."

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HEADLINE	01/30 UK issues Turkey terrorist alert
SOURCE	https://travelweekly.co.uk/news/air/foreign-office-issues-turkey-terrorist-alert
GIST	<p>A warning that terrorists are “very likely” to carry out attacks in Turkey has been issued by the Foreign Office.</p> <p>An updated travel alert was issued on Sunday night without detailing the reason for the timing.</p>

	<p>The revised travel advice highlighted a “heightened risk” of terrorist attack against the aviation industry in Turkey and urged travellers to fully co-operate with security officials at airports.</p> <p>The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office said: “Terrorists are very likely to try to carry out attacks in Turkey.</p> <p>“Most terrorist attacks have taken place in the south-east of the country and in Ankara and Istanbul.</p> <p>“There is a potential that citizens from western countries may be targets or caught up in attacks, particularly in the major cities.</p> <p>“Attacks could be indiscriminate, and occur without warning, including in places visited by foreigners, affecting public buildings, places of worship, major events or large public gatherings.</p> <p>“You should be especially vigilant and where possible avoid places frequented by westerners, including diplomatic premises, places of worship, and around significant religious occasions and public holidays; terrorist groups sometimes call for attacks around these times.</p> <p>“Previous methods of attack have included armed assaults, suicide bombings, car bombings, rocket attacks, arson and improvised explosive devices left in refuse bins, crowded areas, shops and on public transport.</p> <p>“Be vigilant, monitor media reports and keep up to date with this travel advice.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 US: possible terror attacks in Turkey
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-issues-another-warning-possible-terrorist-attacks-turkey-2023-01-30/
GIST	<p>ISTANBUL, Jan 30 (Reuters) - The U.S. embassy in Turkey warned Americans on Monday of possible attacks against churches, synagogues, and diplomatic missions in Istanbul, marking its second such notice in four days, following Koran-burning incidents in Europe.</p> <p>In an updated security alert, the U.S. embassy said "possible imminent retaliatory attacks by terrorists" could take place in areas frequented by Westerners, especially the city's Beyoglu, Galata, Taksim, and Istiklal neighbourhoods.</p> <p>Turkish authorities are investigating the matter, it added.</p> <p>On Friday, several embassies in Ankara including those of the United States, Germany, France and Italy issued security alerts over possible retaliatory attacks against places of worship, following separate incidents in which the Muslim holy book, the Koran, was burned in Sweden, Netherlands and Denmark.</p> <p>On Saturday, Turkey warned its citizens against "possible Islamophobic, xenophobic and racist attacks" in the United States and Europe.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Pandemic restrictions reduced ISIS violence
SOURCE	https://news.yale.edu/2023/01/30/terror-under-lockdown-pandemic-restrictions-reduce-isis-violence
GIST	<p>Lockdown measures aimed at slowing the spread of COVID-19 had the unintended benefit of curtailing violence by the insurgent group ISIS, according to a new study led by Yale political scientist Dawn Brancati.</p> <p>The study, published on Jan. 30 in the journal American Political Science Review, found that government-imposed curfews and travel bans instituted to protect public health in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt</p>

were significantly associated with a reduction in ISIS attacks, especially in urban areas and locations outside the militant organization's base of operations.

"Although ISIS leaders vowed to ramp up attacks during the pandemic, our analysis found that pandemic lockdown measures likely reduced the group's attacks by depleting its financial resources, reducing high-value civilian targets, and making it logistically more difficult for ISIS to conduct attacks by reducing its cover," said Brancati, a senior lecturer in the Department of Political Science in Yale's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. "Our findings provide important insights into the effects of public health measures on violence by non-state actors like ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Boko Haram, as well as the general effectiveness of curfews and travel restrictions as counterinsurgency tools."

In examining the effects of the lockdown measures on violence by non-state actors, Brancati — along with coauthors Jóhanna Birnir of the University of Maryland-College Park and Qutaiba Idlbi of the Atlantic Council — focused on ISIS due to the group's explicit pledge to accelerate violence during the pandemic and because its large financial reserves, rural base, and preference for targeting government installations over civilians make it less vulnerable to the effects of curfews and travel restrictions.

The researchers analyzed data on more than 1,500 ISIS-initiated violent events in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt — the countries where the group launches most of its attacks — compiled by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project covering a 78-week period between Dec. 31, 2018, and June 28, 2020. In March 2020, pandemic-related curfews and travel bans were imposed in all three countries and were in place for three to four months. The researchers also mapped the number and location of ISIS attacks within and across Iraq's governorates using geographic information system (GIS).

The public health measures significantly reduced violence, especially in cities and areas outside of the militant group's rural bases, the study showed. For example, the number of violent events was about 30% lower in Iraq and 15% lower in Syria when COVID-19 related curfews were in place in these countries.

The researchers found that the higher a governorate's population, the more effective curfews were in reducing violence. For example, the number of ISIS-initiated violent events in the governorate of Baghdad, which has a population of 8.1 million, was 11% lower when the curfews were in place. There was no change in the Iraqi governorate of Najaf (a center of Muslim pilgrimage, surpassed by only Mecca and Medina), which has a population of 1.5 million people.

Based on interviews with government officials, military leaders, policy experts, and residents of places covered in the study, the researchers concluded that the curfews and travel restrictions reduced the number of high-value civilian targets and made it more difficult for ISIS militants to move about without being noticed. While there is evidence that the public health measures also strained the group's financial resources — for instance, by limiting its ability to collect money from locals or operate its commercial businesses — the group's financial reserves, which amount to hundreds of millions of dollars by most estimates, likely allowed it to keep funding its cells, the researchers concluded.

Given that pandemic lockdown measures seem to have hindered ISIS's ability to initiate violence, they likely have similar or greater effects on other violent non-state organizations, the researchers said.

"Most non-state actors lack ISIS's financial resources, tend to target civilians more heavily, and operate in urban areas, which suggests they would be more vulnerable to the effects of lockdown measures than ISIS is," Brancati said. "This does not suggest that lockdown measures are a magic bullet in fighting insurgencies since they have harsh side effects on society, especially in developing countries where militant groups operate."

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HEADLINE	01/30 US weapons left behind turn up elsewhere
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/us-weapons-afghanistan-taliban-kashmir-rcna67134

SRINAGAR, India — Weapons left behind by U.S. forces during the [withdrawal from Afghanistan](#) are surfacing in another conflict, further arming militants in the disputed [South Asian region of Kashmir](#) in what experts say could be just the start of the weapons' global journey.

Authorities in Indian-controlled Kashmir tell NBC News that militants trying to annex the region for [Pakistan](#) are carrying M4s, M16s and other U.S.-made arms and ammunition that have rarely been seen in the 30-year conflict. A major reason, they say, is a regional flood of U.S.-funded weapons that fell into the hands of the Taliban when U.S.-led NATO forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021.

Most of the weapons recovered so far, officials say, are from Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) or Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), both Pakistan-based militant groups that the U.S. designates as terrorist organizations. In a [Twitter post](#) last year, for example, police said they had seized an M4 carbine assault rifle after a gunfight that killed two militants from JeM.

Militants from both groups had been sent to Afghanistan to fight alongside or train the Taliban before the U.S. withdrawal, said Lt. Col. Emron Musavi, an Indian army spokesperson in Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir.

"It can be safely assumed that they have access to the weapons left behind," he said.

Government officials in Afghanistan and Pakistan did not respond to requests for comment.

Kashmir, a Himalayan region known for its beautiful landscapes, shares borders with India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China. A separatist insurgency in the part of Kashmir controlled by India has killed tens of thousands of people since the 1990s and been a constant source of tension between nuclear powers India and Pakistan.

The year opened in violence as Kashmir police blamed militants for a Jan. 1 gunfire attack that killed four people in the southern village of Dhangri, followed by an explosion in the same area the next day that killed a 5-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl. At least six people were injured on Jan. 21 in two explosions in the city of Jammu.

While the U.S.-made weapons are unlikely to shift the balance of power in the Kashmir conflict, they give the Taliban a sizable reservoir of combat power potentially available to those willing and able to purchase it, said Jonathan Schroden, director of the Countering Threats and Challenges Program at the Center for Naval Analyses, a research group based outside Washington.

"When combined with the Taliban's need for money and extant smuggling networks, that reservoir poses a substantial threat to regional actors for years to come," he said.

A trove of weapons

More than \$7.1 billion in U.S.-funded military equipment was in the possession of the Afghan government when it fell to the Taliban in August 2021 amid the withdrawal, according to a [Defense Department report](#) published last August. Though more than half of it was ground vehicles, it also included more than 316,000 weapons worth almost \$512 million, plus ammunition and other accessories.

While large numbers of small arms that had been transferred to Afghan forces most likely ended up in the hands of the Taliban, "it's important to remember that nearly all weapons and equipment used by U.S. military forces in Afghanistan were either retrograded or destroyed prior to our withdrawal," Army Lt. Col. Rob Lodewick, a spokesperson for the Pentagon, said in a statement.

The Defense Department report also pointed out that the operational condition of the Afghan army's equipment was unknown.

Questions around the weapons being used in Kashmir were raised in January 2022, when a video of militants brandishing what appeared to be American-made guns was shared widely on Indian social media.

Though the origin of the weapons in such cases can be difficult to verify — some may be modified to look like U.S. weapons, while others may not have been manufactured in the U.S. — the Indian military says it has recovered at least seven that are authentic.

“From the weapons and equipment that we recovered, we realized that there was a spillover of high-tech weapons, night-vision devices and equipment, which were left by the Americans in Afghanistan [and] were now finding their way toward this side,” Maj. Gen. Ajay Chandpuria, an Indian army official, was quoted as saying by Indian media last year.

Jammu and Kashmir Lt. Gov. Manoj Sinha said the government was aware of the issue and that measures were in place to combat the infiltration of U.S. weapons into Kashmir.

“We are monitoring the situation closely and have taken steps accordingly. Our police and army are on the job,” Sinha, the region’s top official, said on the sidelines of a news conference last year at his official residence in Srinagar.

Kashmir police official Vijay Kumar also said authorities were fully capable of countering the militant threat.

“Our forces are tracking down militants on a daily basis,” he said. “We are constantly upgrading our equipment and have the latest weaponry at our disposal.”

The militant groups JeM and LeT could be buying U.S. weapons from the Taliban in Afghanistan, where the United Nations says both groups have bases, or through smugglers in Pakistan, said Ajai Sahni, an author on counterterrorism who serves as executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management, a think tank in New Delhi.

Militants will struggle to get the upper hand, however, without more advanced weapons that have greater firepower but are more difficult to smuggle into the region, Sahni said.

Schroden said that although he had not seen substantial reports of U.S.-made weapons left behind in Afghanistan appearing outside of Kashmir, it would not be surprising if they eventually began turning up farther away in places such as Yemen, Syria and parts of Africa.

“I suspect there hasn’t yet been enough time for these weapons to percolate out that far,” he said. “It’s also possible that the Taliban have held tightly to most of them thus far as part of their efforts to consolidate power and seek legitimization from the international community.”

Beyond weapons, the Taliban’s victory in Afghanistan gave an ideological boost to radical militants in Kashmir and elsewhere, said Ahmad Shuja Jamal, a former Afghan civil servant living in exile in Australia.

Such militants, he said, “now see in clear terms the political dividends of long-term violence.”

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HEADLINE	01/28 UK teen inspired Buffalo, Colorado attacks
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/lengthy-jail-term-for-british-teenager-who-inspired-buffalo-and-colorado-attacks/
GIST	<p>A British teenager, whose extreme right-wing videos were cited by a man who murdered 10 people in a terrorist attack in the U.S., has been jailed for encouraging terrorism. Daniel John Harris also tried to make a gun with a 3D printer.</p> <p>The 19-year-old made and uploaded five videos to an online channel, between February 2021 and March 2022. In the clips, he praised the 2019 terrorist attacks in New Zealand, criticized peaceful protest, produced how-to guides and called for the death of those who work in the criminal justice system.</p>

Harris' clips were commented on and referenced seven times by the man who murdered ten people in a racially-motivated attack at a supermarket in Buffalo, U.S., in May last year. Further evidence shows another was used on the website of a man accused of killing five people at a gay club in Colorado in November.

A sixth charge related to the possession of the 3D printer, with intent.

Harris was arrested by officers from Counter-Terrorism Policing in the East Midlands (CTP EM) at his home in Glossop Derbyshire on May 16, 2022 – two days after the attack in Buffalo – and subsequently charged with a number of offenses.

In December, following a trial at Manchester Crown Court, he was found guilty of five counts of encouraging terrorism (contrary to Section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2006) and one count of possession of material for terrorist purposes (contrary to Section 57 of the Terrorism Act 2000).

On January 27, 2023), Harris was jailed for 11-and-a-half years, plus three further years on license on his release, when he will also be the subject of a five-year Serious Crime Prevention Order.

'Highly dangerous'

On sentencing, Judge Field KC acknowledged Harris' mental health issues and unconventional upbringing 'may impact his ability to talk to others and understand boundaries', but added that there was 'no evidence of any such condition affecting your culpability'.

He referenced his previous offending, including the defacing of a George Floyd statue, and described his offenses as 'calculated, deliberate and sophisticated, demonstrating high level of intelligence and competency'.

He described him as 'highly dangerous and a significant risk to members of the public', adding that the attacks in the U.S. were 'not only appalling, but no more than what you intended others to do'.

CTP EM Detective Inspector Chris Brett said: "On the face of it, Harris presents as an unassuming, quiet young man, but scratch the surface and it's a more sinister picture. While efforts were made to support him – with a referral to establish if he had been groomed, and attempts to engage with him through the Prevent program – the extent of his views and intentions were exposed through his continued efforts to post and create online content of an extreme nature throughout.

"Harris was ultimately deemed not to have been groomed, rather his provocative words and inflammatory films were potentially radicalizing others.

"The threat he posed became such that we had to act in order to ensure the safety of the wider public. The reference to one of his videos in the prelude to the Buffalo attack is a case in point. The level of risk was laid bare when we found evidence of an intention to create a gun from parts printed from a 3D printer, kept in a room used for storage. Granted, it was a crude attempt.

"Harris could see the reaction his videos were getting. This was not a one-off, this was not a game, this was a concerted effort to generate a following and influence people.

"Even once arrested, Harris continued to be obstructive to our investigatory efforts."

Brett acknowledged the work of the investigation team, supported by colleagues at Derbyshire Constabulary and in CTP North East, on what he said has been an extremely challenging, but sadly not unique, investigation.

	<p>“It’s no secret that across the country we are seeing more and more young people hitting the radar of counterterrorism police, especially those who are displaying extreme right-wing views.</p> <p>“Anyone who downloads, shares or creates extreme content online risks being arrested under terrorism legislation. And don’t think you can hide behind usernames, avatars and other technical blockers, as we have teams of highly-skilled digital investigators with a track record for getting to the source.</p> <p>“As we have seen in this case against Daniel Harris, such irresponsible and hateful behavior can have deadly consequences. Not only did he create and share offensive posts and videos, he tried (and failed) to make a gun. And while not all individuals have the means to act upon their words, in the online space, they can easily spread to inspire others who do.</p> <p>“Today Harris has been made accountable for his actions. I hope his story and lengthy sentence acts as a deterrent to anyone else considering treading a similar path.”</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 Jailed in UK: planning infrastructure attacks
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/man-jailed-in-u-k-for-planning-infrastructure-attacks/
GIST	<p>A man has been jailed in the U.K. after being found guilty in December of planning to attack phone, radio and TV masts and damage the road network.</p> <p>Oliver Lewin, aged 38, of Ferrers Road, Coalville, was sentenced to six and a half years after he planned to mount widespread coordinated attacks over a number of months including recruiting others to help his plan because of a mistrust of authority.</p> <p>He used social media to identify and recruit like-minded individuals to help via Telegram to create a national network of those sharing his ideology to carry out coordinated attacks.</p> <p>Lewin also claimed he was ex-military and spent a lot of time writing a manual to train others.</p> <p>Lewin, who previously worked as an AV engineer installing and maintaining radio masts, carried out meticulous research online into systems to identify weaknesses of the masts. He also carried out on site research during reconnaissance missions in his local area.</p> <p>In August 2021, he built a hideout so he could hide from a police helicopter and planned to damage a culvert which disrupted water flow underneath the M1 motorway. He carried out training exercises, taught himself to walk in the dark and how to avoid traveling by road at night.</p> <p>Lewin was arrested on August 25, supported by Leicestershire’s Specialist Support Firearms team and Counter Terrorism East Midlands, for preparing to commit an act of terrorism. Following his arrest, police seized a large amount of tools and army surplus combat gear as well as weapon accessories to accompany the three air rifles he owned.</p> <p>Officers also seized two air rifles and pellets, pistol, BB gun, a walkie talkie and binoculars as well as a packed rucksack to camp overnight.</p> <p>Head of Counter Terrorism Policing West Midlands CTU, Detective Chief Superintendent Mark Payne, said: “In interview, Lewin claimed he was a fantasist but it is clear he took the steps to carry out reconnaissance of targets to attack, bought equipment and tools, dug hide-outs and tried to recruit and train others.</p> <p>“He wanted to advance a political cause by damaging property and wiping out media organizations. Extremists use this kind of ideology to create discord, distrust and fear among our communities and we strive to counter this.”</p>

HEADLINE	01/30 Winter has come for Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/30/afghanistan-cold-winter-humanitarian/
GIST	<p>For much of the past year, the West’s policymakers and analysts were possessed by one haunting question: How bad will Europe’s winter be? Energy prices on the continent surged because of the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia’s energy industry. The prospect of a deep cold spell as European governments rationed gas supplies conjured images of a bleak winter from Lviv to London, with industry going dark and pensioners scavenging for firewood.</p> <p>Instead, parts of the continent recently experienced record warm temperatures, which lowered energy demand and allowed national utility companies to fill their natural gas storage facilities to the brim. The worst did not come to pass: Russia’s leverage over Europe did not perceptibly grow, nor did public fatigue over Europe’s commitment to Ukraine’s war effort dent the resolve of its national governments.</p> <p>But consider another part of the world that has receded from the West’s attention over the course of the Ukraine conflict. Afghanistan is currently in the grips of its worst winter in more than a decade. Temperatures recently plunged to below minus-34 degrees Celsius (minus-29.2 degrees Fahrenheit). Officials in the local Taliban government said the cold has been lethal, leading to more than 160 deaths over the span of about two weeks, and killing more than 70,000 livestock.</p> <p>My colleague Sammy Westfall noted the details at the end of last week: “Of the 162 people who have died because of the cold weather since Jan. 10, more than half died in the past week, said Shafiullah Rahimi, a spokesman for the Ministry of Disaster Management, Reuters reported Thursday. Afghans have been dying of hypothermia, as well as carbon monoxide poisoning and gas leakage, amid a widespread lack of heating systems, local outlet Tolo News reported.” The death toll is expected to rise as communities in rural areas dig themselves out of the snow.</p> <p>The dismal conditions have struck a society ill-equipped to cope. Afghanistan is already buckling under the stress of a rolling humanitarian crisis, triggered by years of drought and the economic implosion that followed the Taliban’s takeover in 2021. The country’s foreign reserves are frozen by U.S. sanctions; its banking system has collapsed, partially due to the disappearance of foreign aid; and the price of ordinary goods — including firewood and coal — have skyrocketed. Two-thirds of the country’s 40 million people will likely require humanitarian assistance of some form in 2023, including some 15 million children. Roughly half the country may face acute food insecurity.</p> <p>Afghanistan imports the bulk of its electricity from its neighbors and the country is accustomed to shortages and power cuts. But the blackouts this winter have proved all the more miserable, forcing families in some instances to choose between feeding themselves or trying to keep warm. Many are struggling to do either.</p> <p>“If we buy coal and wood, then we won’t be able to buy food,” a woman named Maryam in Samangan province, north of the Hindu Kush mountain range, told Al Jazeera. “This is the coldest winter of my life, and I don’t know how we will survive it without food or heat.”</p> <p>Sharafuddin, a resident of the city of Herat, told Radio Azadi last week: “During the cold nights, we are awake with our children and cannot sleep. It is already midday, and I have neither had breakfast nor drank tea. ... I’m sitting here praying to God.”</p> <p>The country’s hospitals are “on life support,” according to the International Committee of the Red Cross. A health worker in Kabul described to the New Humanitarian what happened when her clinic had to turn off its generator after continuous use: “We had to shut it for two hours, and we told the mothers to find a way to warm their newborns. If we kept them in the incubators without electricity they would freeze. If we took them out, they could have problems breathing.”</p>

The difficulty of the situation is exacerbated by the defiance and extremism of the Taliban

authorities. Since seizing power 18 months ago, the fundamentalist Islamist movement has set about reversing the legacy of two decades of U.S.-backed government, banning girls from secondary schools, then universities and most recently barring women from working in domestic or foreign-backed nongovernment organizations, many of which are instrumental in delivering what meager aid is available to the Afghan public.

The Taliban, whose pariah government in Kabul is not recognized by the international community, has shown little inclination to bend to either local or outside anger over these discriminatory moves. Individual governments, even those that have a long history of dealings with the Taliban, like Qatar and Pakistan, claim to have little leverage over the factions of the Taliban dictating policy on the ground in Afghanistan. The United States has [limited diplomatic tools](#) beyond more targeted sanctions to place more pressure on the Taliban.

U.N. officials have pressed the Taliban to allow exemptions for female workers in the health nongovernmental organizations, a concession that shows it's possible to chip away at the Islamists' entrenched position. "We have not seen the history of the Taliban reversing any edict," U.N. Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed [told reporters](#) after visiting the country earlier this month. "What we have seen is exemptions that, hopefully, if we keep pushing them, they will water down those edicts to a point where we will get women and girls back into school and into the workplace." She [added](#) that "a lot of what we have to deal with is how we travel the Taliban from the 13th century to the 21st. And that's, that's a journey."

Martin Griffiths, the U.N.'s humanitarian chief who also recently traveled to Afghanistan, said it was important for his organization and other agencies to be able to work with women and necessary for the Taliban to make "practical exceptions" given the circumstances.

"We don't have time," [Griffiths said](#). "The winter is with us, people are dying, famine is looming."

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HEADLINE	01/30 Pakistan mosque bombing: 20 killed
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/pakistan-mosque-bombing-peshawar-deaths-injuries-police-suicide-bomber-taliban/
GIST	<p><i>Peshawar, Pakistan</i> — A suicide bomber struck on Monday inside a mosque in the northwestern Pakistani city of Peshawar, reportedly killing at least 20 people and wounding scores more, officials said. The bomber detonated his suicide vest as worshipers — including many policemen from nearby police offices — were praying inside.</p> <p>The impact of the explosion collapsed the roof of the mosque, which caved in and injured many, according to Zafar Khan, a local police officer.</p> <p>No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing in Peshawar, the capital of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, but as CBS News' Sami Yousafzai reports, the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan terror group, the Pakistani Taliban commonly known by the abbreviation TTP, recently broke off peace talks with the country's government and relaunched military operations against state security forces.</p> <p>The Pakistani group is believed to have gained strength over the last couple years, since the Afghan Taliban retook control of the neighboring country in August 2021. The TTP are a separate group to the Afghan Taliban, but they are close allies.</p> <p>The Pakistani group has waged an insurgency in Pakistan for 15 years, fighting for stricter enforcement of Islamic laws in the country, the release of their members who are in government custody and a reduction of Pakistani military presence in the country's former tribal regions.</p>

A Pakistani security officer who spoke to CBS News on the condition of anonymity said the country's armed forces had made significant strides against the TTP but that the group had managed to regain operational strength by operating across the Afghan border, enabling it to "start attacking soft targets in Pakistan."

The official said TTP leaders were orchestrating attacks inside Pakistan from Afghan soil, and said it was the "duty and responsibility" of the Afghan Taliban regime ruling the neighboring nation to prevent such operations.

A survivor of Monday's attack, 38-year-old police officer Meena Gul, said he was inside the mosque when the bomb went off. He said he didn't know how he survived unhurt. He could hear cries and screams after the bomb exploded, he said. There were more than 150 worshippers inside the mosque when the bomb went off, Gul added.

Khan, the police officer, said rescuers were trying to get the wounded to a nearby hospital. He said several of the wounded were in critical condition at a hospital and there were fears the death toll would rise.

Another local police officer, Aftab Khan, told CBS News he was preparing to go to the mosque to pray when he heard the "huge blast."

"Due to security threats and fears of Taliban attack, police were on high alert," he said, "but this tragic attack took the lives of many police and civilians."

Pakistan's DAWN TV network quoted Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as condemning the attack and lambasting the attackers as having "nothing to do with Islam."

"Terrorists want to create fear by targeting those who perform the duty of defending Pakistan," he said, alluding to the high number of security forces who use the mosque. "The entire nation is standing united against the menace of terrorism."

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HEADLINE	01/28 Reality of Taliban war against narcotics
SOURCE	https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/world/reality-talibans-war-narcotics
GIST	<p>The Taliban, after coming to power, vowed to eradicate the production and cultivation of narcotics on its soil, but with the condition that it receive generous funding from the international community. After a year in power, the production of narcotics has rather increased, and the Taliban has failed to deliver on its promise. The data released by the United Nations in 2020 mentioned that Afghanistan accounted for 85% of the global opium production and generated employment for over half a million people, making it the largest economic sector. Furthermore, it produced 6,800 tonnes of opium in 2021, and the output grew by 8% in the last year. The total income generated from the opiates will amount to between \$1.8 billion and \$2.7 billion in 2021, which is one of the most profitable businesses in the failed state. The Taliban did engage in publicity stunts after the decree was issued in August, circulating images of destroying poppies, but it made little difference to an Afghan economy that was deeply entrenched in narcoterrorism.</p> <p>Taliban on banning poppies</p> <p>The Taliban tried banning poppy cultivation in 2001, but it was found that Mullah Omar had purchased a huge quantity of opium from the market at a low price just before the ban, and after the decree was issued, the prices shot up. This allowed the Taliban leadership to make a handsome sum of money, which sets a bad precedent in analysing the Taliban's current claim about acting against illicit opiates. Sara Hakimi, a former Afghanistan Foreign Ministry official specialising in counternarcotics, told the authors that "the Taliban's statement on eradicating narcotics production was mostly for getting international recognition or legitimacy from Islamic countries as growing and profiting from opiates is considered haram in Islam." To demonstrate that they were taking action, they imposed a ban on poppy cultivation on small farmers who were cultivating in small quantities. The Taliban's major funding comes from narco-terrorism and the taxes they collect from the farmers who are growing the opiates. With the financial restrictions imposed by the international community and no robust external funding, they have to keep cultivating it for economic</p>

reasons. More than the economic reasons, it is the political reasons that don't allow the Taliban to put a blanket ban on opiates. The Taliban leaders have their networks for trafficking, and it has been one of their major revenue streams for years. Hence, it will create a division among their groups if a ban has been imposed.

The primary sources of the Taliban's income still come from the production and trafficking of methamphetamines and heroin. It generates its maximum profits from collecting taxes from poppy plantations, extracting the drugs, and smuggling them through its networks. This money has allowed the members to move up the value chain, fund the war against NATO, and increase their battlefield potency all these years. The other reason for the Taliban's reluctance to act against poppy cultivation can be traced back to the earlier Taliban's ban in 2001, which ignited a huge political storm, and as David Manfield, a leading expert on Afghanistan's drug economy, mentioned, 'the Taliban doesn't want to alienate the rural population and create an atmosphere for a violent uprising.' Hence, the drug economy is so deeply embedded in the survival tactics of the Taliban that it wouldn't require any concrete action.

The blooming meth industry in Afghanistan

Apart from poppy production, the methamphetamine industry is also growing at a rapid speed, and satellite imagery shows that it has only intensified under Taliban rule. Hundreds of meth labs have appeared in the last few years. Methamphetamine (meth or ice), which was grown in Afghanistan, once had to compete with the rest of the world, but after the discovery of the ephedra plant, which is grown locally, the quality and production of meth have boosted drastically. The opium traders are using the same route and infrastructure to smuggle meth to their neighbouring countries. Sara mentioned that 'the shift from heroin took place when everyone realised that they could produce methamphetamine at a cheaper rate. It began in areas where wild ephedra plants were grown, particularly in the highlands of south and south-east Afghanistan. The drug lords understood that these ephedra plants, which were grown in the wild, were readily available in the market, and the authorities were turning a blind eye. They started buying these plants in bulk quantities and setting up labs, which amplified the production. The precursor chemicals that are used to make meth can be obtained from cough syrups that can also be purchased locally.'

The Taliban initially turned a blind eye, like the predecessor government, but imposed a notice ban on the plant when the prices in the market were down. The ban, which was imposed only in a few provinces, helped the meth producers churn out more revenue as the prices increased, and it didn't impact the farmers as the harvest season ended before that. It is assumed that the methamphetamine market will be as large as the heroin market in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

Implications for India

India has been falling under the wrath of narcoterrorism for several years, especially with its proximity to the Golden Crescent, which is the world's largest producer of illicit opium. Illegal drugs from Afghanistan have entered India through all routes, including air, sea, and land borders from the neighbouring countries of Sri Lanka and Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran. Not only are these drugs re-exported to Europe and local African markets, but they are also used for domestic consumption. The UNODC's World Drug Report 2022 has warned of India's vulnerability to increased supply as the trafficking of opiates is moving eastward. After the Taliban takeover, Indian security officials have intercepted massive consignments originating from Afghanistan, like the 2.7 billion USD worth of heroin and the 1.5 million USD worth of methamphetamine. Sara Hakimi, speaking to the authors, lastly mentioned that the economy of Afghanistan has collapsed completely and more people are being pushed below the poverty line. Farmers are being encouraged to grow opium, which allows them to earn higher profits than seasoned legal crops. Since the country's borders and customs are currently under the Taliban, it is easier to produce the crops, make more laboratories, and even export them.

This brought India's worst fear to life, as these illicit drugs and small arms trade are the major source for funding Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in the country, and India, being the sole licit producer of opium with huge export revenues, has much to lose if this remains unchecked. The international community must look at the possibility of relocating the cultivators to a different form of economy, or else the drug-entrenched economy of Afghanistan will only destabilise the region and have a serious impact on India's security.

HEADLINE	01/29 Pakistan: major terror network dismantled
SOURCE	https://www.nation.com.pk/29-Jan-2023/intelligence-agencies-smash-a-major-terror-network
GIST	<p>ISAMABAD - Intelligence operatives Saturday claimed to have busted and dismantled a major terror network belonging to the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and spread over various parts of KPK and saved the country from a major terrorist disaster. According to the details shared by security and intelligence agencies with The Nation, Afghan cell phone SIMs and various drugs and currency from the terrorist network possession were confiscated which helped in busting the terror network.</p> <p>According to details, on 19th January a terrorist who belonged to the outlawed Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) carried out suicide attack on the Takhta Baig check post in Jamrud KP, which resulted in the death of three police personnel. After the attack the attacker also blew himself up resulting in his instant death.</p> <p>Later the TTP claimed responsibility for the suicide attack on the check post.</p> <p>The intelligence agencies after the attack started a probe and had collected bullet shells and body parts of the dead attacker for forensic analysis with the help of CCTV footage and geo-fencing.</p> <p>According to the information gathered as result of the investigations on January 21, it was emerged that TTP terrorist Umar was planner and was behind the suicide attack.</p> <p>The investigation further revealed that a resident of Jamrud and another TTP member Satana Jan facilitated terrorist Umar in planning and executing the attack.</p> <p>The intelligence agencies further revealed in their investigations that another two suspects Farman and Abdul Qayyum close to the suicide attacker were also arrested in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) on January 23. The outlawed TTP has admitted that in the IBO operation Satana Jan who facilitated Terrorist Umar, was killed.</p> <p>The security agencies on January 27th carried out another IBO operation on a tip-off and subsequently arrested the facilitators Fazal Amin, Fazal Ahmad, Muhammad Amir and Hamadullah. Another two Afghan citizens were also arrested in the operation.</p> <p>One of the arrested facilitators Fazal Ahmed during the investigations revealed that the suicide attacker of 19th January terror attack was an Afghan citizen.</p> <p>terrorist facilitator Satana Jan brought attacker to Pakistan and provided him suicide jacket and other weapons.</p> <p>The facilitator visited the attack venue and took pictures with his phone.</p> <p>Satana Jan was part of TTP in north Waziristan and used four places for hiding and also used these places to plan suicide attacks on security forces.</p> <p>The suicide attacker was sent to Pakistan by his handlers for carrying out attack on security check post on 19th January 2023.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Palestinian terrorism against Israel in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/palestinian-terrorism-against-israel-2022-methods-trends-and-description/
GIST	<p>In 2022 there was a substantial rise in the number of Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israel. Eighty-six significant attacks^[2] were carried out, up from 54 in 2021, 40 in 2020, 34 in 2019 and 55 in 2018; 16 of the attacks were carried out inside Israeli territory (one in 2021). Thirty Israelis were killed (24 civilians and six members of the security forces). One Border Police fighter was killed in an operational activity in Samaria. In 2021 three civilians were killed. Sixteen terrorist attacks were carried out inside Israel. There were 46 shooting attacks (the most deadly form of attack) during the year, 54% of the total number (12 in</p>

2021). There were 25 stabbing attacks, 29% of the total (30 in 2021). Seven were vehicular ramming attacks and four were combined attacks. In addition, according to official sources, there were about 3,000 instances of rock-throwing (about 7,600 according to the IDF) and about 500 instances of Molotov cocktail-throwing (about 1,200 according to the IDF).^[3]

One round of fighting was conducted in the Gaza Strip, Operation Breaking Dawn, in August 2022. During the Operation 946 rockets and mortar shells hit Israeli territory. Eleven rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip before the Operation and two after, a total of 959 rockets and mortar shells. Therefore, with the exception of Operation Breaking Dawn, the annual trend was towards a decrease in rocket attacks. The number of terrorist attacks from the Gaza Strip targeting the Israeli communities near the border security fence also declined significantly, and there were almost no instances of the so-called “controlled violence” (return marches, IED and incendiary balloon launching, night harassment unit activities).

In 2022 there was a substantial increase in what the Palestinian Authority (PA) refers to as “peaceful popular resistance” [popular terrorism].^[4] Most of the attacks were carried out by lone terrorists or local networks. The attacks included throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails, shootings, stabbings, vehicular ramming and combinations of two or more of the above. The Palestinian leadership, headed by Mahmoud Abbas, encouraged the “popular resistance,” did not condemn or criticize it and praised the terrorists, including when Israeli civilians were killed and wounded.

The wave of current wave of terrorism began in effect in March 2022 with a series of attacks inside Israel (two of them carried out by operatives affiliated with ISIS), and continued after Operation Wave Breaker. The objective of the Operation, which focused on Jenin and Nablus in northern Samaria, was to destroy the networks’ military-terrorist capabilities and prevent further attacks, and in effect it continues to this day. Dozens of terrorist operatives have been killed, attacks in Judea and Samaria have increased, and concern exists regarding more attacks, including inside Israel.

Several new aspects of terrorist activity in Judea and Samaria surfaced in 2022:

The wave of attacks and Israeli security force counterterrorism activities led to the growth of a new type of local network consisting of armed Palestinian terrorist operatives, independent or members of organizations. They do not take orders either from the established terrorist organizations or the PA’s security services. They include the Lion’s Den network and the Nablus Battalion in Nablus and the Jenin Battalion, which was initially composed of operatives from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) military-terrorist wing and which is based in Jenin.^[5] In addition, networks which were virtually inactive in recent years were reactivated. The most prominent is the al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades (AAMB), until recently affiliated with Fatah. While it does have Fatah operatives, its new identity is generic and it is mostly composed of armed squads which operate independently, with no central leadership or hierarchy.^[6] Unlike previous years, when most terrorist operatives were lone wolves without organizational identity, this past year many have affiliated themselves with the new networks, evident by the claims of responsibility issued by the various organizations and networks. In a number of instances more than one organization or network has claimed responsibility for an attack.

An examination of the terrorist operatives in the new networks revealed many were the sons of PA security service operatives, including high-ranking officers, or security services operatives who were also active in the networks. In addition, many PA security service operatives are former terrorists who were integrated into the services through various arrangements.

The types and methods used in the terrorist attacks also changed. There was a relative decline in the number of stabbing attacks, which were the most prevalent type of attack in previous years and were carried out by lone terrorists. There was a substantial rise in the number of shooting attacks, which accounted for more than half of the attacks carried out in 2022: a total of 46 shooting attacks were carried out, 54% of the total number, up from 12 in 2021, when they made up 22% of the total. The change was apparently a direct result of the formation of the established and quasi-established networks, which provide a framework for terrorist operatives and allow them to carry out fairly complex attacks which demand preparation and the acquisition of weapons.

The number of attacks and attempted attacks inside Israel also rose significantly. This past year 16 terrorist attacks were carried out inside Israeli territory, four of them in Jerusalem, compared with one in 2021 and three in 2020.

Three terrorist attacks were carried out on behalf of global jihad organizations, one each in Beersheba, Hadera and Jerusalem. The attack in Hadera was carried out by two ISIS operatives and for which ISIS claimed responsibility; the organization listed it in its annual summary of attacks. The other two attacks were apparently inspired by ISIS' ideology. All of the terrorists had Israeli ID cards.

The terrorist attacks were also deadlier than in previous years. In 2022 30 Israelis were killed (24 civilians and six members of the security forces), up from four in 2021 and three in 2020.

This past year the PA's support for terrorist operatives continued and increased, including attacks in which Israelis were killed. The PA gave political and media [propaganda] support to popular terrorism, members of the Palestinian leadership paid condolences calls to the families of terrorists who were killed, the PA continued paying generous stipends to terrorists imprisoned in Israel and to the families of shaheeds and prisoners, paid to rebuild the houses of terrorists demolished by the Israeli security forces, glorified the terrorists and their attacks, including in the Palestinian formal and informal education systems, presented awards and plaques, etc. The PA completely ignored the presence of its security personnel or their sons among the terrorist operatives. No action was taken against them and nothing was said when their parents openly supported the attacks. Rather, Mahmoud Abbas called the families to offer condolences and members of the Palestinian leadership visited the mourning tents. On occasion formal military funerals were held for terrorists.

In the meantime, incitement to attack Israel continues in the Palestinian social networks, strongly influencing the younger generation. Young and adolescent Palestinians are exposed to posts and pictures encouraging violence, justifying terrorist attacks and praising those who carry them out. The most popular platforms are WhatsApp and Telegram, while videos are uploaded to Instagram and TikTok, which are especially popular with the younger generation, and for many almost the exclusive source of information. Clear evidence for the trend towards increasing incitement was provided by a public opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, whose December 2022 poll showed that 55% of respondents answered that a return to the "armed struggle" [terrorist attacks] was necessary, and 72% supported the establishment of the various local armed groups. However, apparently support for terrorism was not translated into broad enlistment and remained only digital.^[7]

Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem

During 2022 there was a substantial rise in the number of terrorist attacks. A total of 86 significant attacks were carried out, up from 54 in 2021. This past year the PA included shooting attacks in its definition of "peaceful popular resistance." As opposed to past years, when most of the attacks were carried out by lone terrorists with no organizational affiliation, this past year many were carried out by network operatives. The attacks also became more deadly, with 30 Israelis killed in 2022, four in 2021.

This past year shootings were the most common form of attack. There were 46 during the year, 54% of the total number (12 in 2021, five in 2020). There were 25 stabbing attacks, 29% of the total (30 in 2021, 19 in 2020). Seven were vehicular ramming attacks, 8% of the total (eight in 2021) and four were combined attacks. In addition, according to official sources, there were 3,075 instances of rock-throwing (7,589 according to the IDF spokesman) and 525 instances of Molotov cocktail-throwing (1,286 according to the IDF spokesman). The discrepancy in the numbers is apparently caused by the IDF's inclusion of instances of rock and Molotov cocktail-throwing during clashes between Israeli security forces and the Palestinian population during counterterrorism activities, riot dispersal, etc.

The Gaza Strip

In 2022 Israeli territory was hit by 959 rocket and mortar shells fired from the Gaza Strip, 946 of them in August during Operation Breaking Dawn. The Operation was relatively short and targeted the PIJ in the Gaza Strip, which was planning to attack Israel because of events in Judea and Samaria. As opposed to

Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021, there was no violence from Judea and Samaria or Israeli Arabs.

Activity in the Gaza Strip:

Discounting the rockets and mortar shells fired during the Operation, 13 rockets were fired during the year, 11 before the Operation and two after. Most of them were fired by groups collectively known as “rogue organizations” and for which no claim of responsibility was issued.

Along the border, only isolated clashes with IDF forces were recorded.

There were no popular terrorism activities, no return marches, balloon launchings or night harassment unit activities.

Hamas, the PIJ and other organizations continued fomenting unrest in Judea and Samaria and encouraging local residents to carry out terrorist attacks. At the same time, the organizations were careful to preserve relative calm in the Gaza Strip, for which Hamas’ policies were criticized.

The decline of terrorist activity in the Gaza Strip was most likely the result of Hamas policies to improve the local economic situation – although naturally not at the expense of its military buildup – and insofar as was possible, to avoid another round of fighting with Israel. Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, claimed the movement’s order of priorities focused on civilian conditions and a military buildup in preparation for a future round of combat with Israel. The PIJ in the Gaza Strip was relatively restrained during the year, as opposed to its activities in Judea and Samaria, especially in Jenin.

However, the relative quiet in the Gaza Strip is fragile, because Hamas and the PIJ repeatedly threaten that unusual events in Judea and Samaria, especially in Jerusalem, difficulties in transferring aid funds to the Gaza Strip and the worsening of the conditions of the security prisoners in Israeli jails would provide an excuse to renew and/or escalate rocket fire and other terrorist activities.

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HEADLINE	01/29 Concerns over domestic terrorism charges
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/arrests-atlanta-cop-city-protests-raise-concerns-domestic-terrorism-ch-rcna67755
GIST	<p>The decision by prosecutors to pursue domestic terrorism charges against opponents of a police training center outside Atlanta is drawing criticism, with some legal experts saying it’s a potentially dangerous overreach that could be viewed as politically motivated.</p> <p>More than a dozen people have been charged with domestic terrorism in connection with the protests, including seven people after a Jan. 18 confrontation with police who were trying to clear the proposed site of the center, dubbed "Cop City" by critics.</p> <p>One man was fatally shot by police in the confrontation after he opened fire and wounded a state trooper, authorities said. In protests that followed the killing and the police sweeps, six people were arrested and charged with domestic terrorism.</p> <p>In December, the same charges were filed against five people after law enforcement moved in to clear barricades and confront protesters.</p> <p>Critics of domestic terrorism laws, including some civil rights groups, oppose them “because of the risk of politicization, because they can be used against politically disfavored groups by the government,” Patrick Keenan, a professor of law at the University of Illinois, said.</p> <p>A 2017 Georgia law defines domestic terrorism as a felony intended to kill or harm people; “disable or destroy critical infrastructure, a state or government facility, or a public transportation system”; “intimidate the civil population or any of its political subdivisions”; and change or coerce state policy or affect the</p>

conduct of government “by use of destructive devices, assassination, or kidnapping.” Conviction carries a maximum sentence of 35 years in prison.

The allegations against the protesters include trespassing, resisting arrest, throwing rocks and glass bottles and damaging property, including setting fire to a police car. Authorities have also said they found “explosive devices, gasoline, and road flares” in an area in the forest where protesters had makeshift treehouses.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, has called the protesters “militant activists” and said “we will bring the full force of state and local law enforcement down on those trying to bring about a radical agenda through violent means.”

Although [“domestic terrorism” is defined in the Patriot Act of 2001, there is no specific federal crime](#) covering acts of terrorism inside the U.S. that are not connected to al Qaeda, the Islamic State, other officially designated international terrorism groups or their sympathizers — even though the U.S. has [said](#) in recent years that white supremacist and militia groups are a top domestic terrorism threat.

Last year’s mass shooting at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, fit that category, said Javed Ali, an associate professor at the University of Michigan’s Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

The 19-year-old white supremacist who shot and killed 10 Black people last May [was the first person in New York state convicted of domestic terrorism motivated by hate; he also pleaded guilty to first-degree murder](#). The terrorism charge carries an automatic sentence of life in prison.

But in a number of states, including Georgia, domestic terrorism laws include a wide range of offenses outside those motivated by hate.

Because the Georgia statute “focuses on conduct that is intended to intimidate the government or to affect the government in any way,” Keenan, the law professor, said, it is “especially vulnerable to politicized use.”

Keenan said he believes attaching the domestic terrorism label to protesters could have “some really dangerous effects.”

“I don’t think it’s mostly protesters who are the biggest domestic terrorism threats. Domestic terrorism threats are coming from other places, and so to use this statute really publicly and prominently to try to squash this protest seems to me, kind of the politicized use of the law that a lot of people were worried about,” he said.

Keenan said that while he does not condone violence or attacks on law enforcement, he believes there are other ways to address those things under Georgia law that do not include a domestic terrorism charge.

“As someone who handled capital murder cases in Georgia, I can tell you Georgia law has a lot of ways to deal with violence against law enforcement or against anyone,” he said. “So this domestic terrorism statute is not necessary and it can lead to this politicized use that I think doesn’t do anybody any good.”

Joshua Schiffer, an attorney who represents one of the protesters, said he believes that as the investigation moves forward, “the charges won’t be justified,” calling them “particularly concerning” given Georgia’s rich history of civil rights and civil disobedience.

“The use by the state of such an aggressive statute indicates the state’s position when it comes to protesters and how the state intends to deal with protesters,” he said. “This state action is meant to impact and chill this protest issue nationally.”

Ali, a former senior U.S. government counterterrorism official, said such cases highlight what could be a new development at the state and local level where authorities will begin to bring more domestic terrorism charges.

He said that prosecutors typically bring such charges when they believe there is enough evidence to support them, “because why would you bring a charge forward on something that’s fairly unusual and controversial if you’re going to lose the case in court?”

In the months leading up to the most recent arrests, critics have raised environmental concerns about building a \$90 million law enforcement training center on 85 acres just outside Atlanta. Opponents say it would devastate forest, and they also object to making such a huge investment in policing after the national 2020 protests against police violence and systemic racism following the murder of George Floyd.

Officials have defended the center, saying that the forested land was the only viable location and law enforcement needs modern training facilities.

On Thursday, Kemp declared a state of emergency in Georgia, the result, he said, of “unlawful assemblage, violence, overt threats of violence, disruption of peace and tranquility of this state and danger existing to persons and property.” The order gives Kemp the ability to call in the Georgia National Guard.

Marlon Kautz, an activist with the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, which provides resources to people arrested during protests, said the group was “extremely alarmed at the use of this domestic terrorism statute.”

“It’s clear that it’s being used in an overly broad way to maliciously prosecute people,” he said.

The Atlanta Solidarity Fund said that the state of Georgia was trying to “set an alarming precedent” with the charges.

“If they are successful, protesters across the country could be facing similar speech-chilling ‘domestic terrorism’ charges,” it said in a statement this week. “We must strongly reject this extreme level of repression here and now, before it becomes the norm for activists in every movement.”

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HEADLINE	01/29 Somalia: al-Shabab grip loosening
SOURCE	https://allafrica.com/stories/202301290067.html
GIST	<p>Minneapolis — In Somalia, al-Qaida-affiliated militant group al-Shabab has been on a gradual retreat for months, and this could be the beginning of their end, experts told VOA.</p> <p>In a televised speech in August 2022, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced a "total war" against the group, days after it staged a deadly hotel siege in Mogadishu, killing at least 21 people and wounding more than 100 others.</p> <p>The president's announcement came as local clans in central Somalia were revolting against the presence and the oppression of al-Shabab in their territories.</p> <p>Since July, Somali government military operations in parts of the country have gained significant ground from the militants.</p> <p>Al-Shabab ceded territories and major towns in the central Somali regions of Hiran, Middle Shabelle, Galmudug and South-West State. Government officials say they have killed more than 2,000 al-Shabab fighters, a number VOA could not independently verify.</p> <p>As the government campaign enters its eighth month in February, the Somali government is preparing to open new battlefronts in southern parts of the country Somalia's defense minister said Friday.</p>

A week ago, government forces in Jubaland State took a step forward by capturing Janay Abdalle, a strategic village, from al-Shabab. Jubaland borders Kenya and is one of five Federal-member states in Somalia.

Speaking to VOA's Somali service, Ismail Dahir Osman, former deputy commander of Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency, said al-Shabab has been on the retreat since the government started supporting local clan militias fighting with them.

"Since the government offensive began with the support of local citizens, who are fed up with the group's oppressions, al-Shabab has been losing territories and former strongholds in central regions. Thanks to Somali government military operations backed by local clan militias and foreign partners, including the United States," he said.

Colonel Abdullahi Ali Maow, a former Somali intelligence official told VOA that he agrees the militants are on a downward spiral.

"It is obvious that al-Shabab has been losing ground and were squeezed out of major towns and villages they have been controlling for more than 10 years, including Harardhere, a coastal town and former pirate hub captured by Somali government forces on January 16," he said. "I think it is the beginning of their end."

Even if the group's retreat continues, it is not the first time the status of a jihadi group in Somalia was damaged by multiple defeats.

It happened in 2006 when troops from what was then Somalia's Transitional Federal Government backed by Ethiopian troops defeated the Islamic Courts Union that had ruled Mogadishu and large swaths of south and central Somalia for months.

Disorder within the ranks helped the more radical terrorist elements within the ICU emerge. That became al-Shabab. The militant group grew and took control of large territories.

So, if they're defeated again, what's to keep them from returning?

Hassan Sheikh Ali Nur, a professor at the Somali National University in Mogadishu, said this time is different.

"The ICU time, there was not a strong and internationally recognized government in Somalia, there was not the international military support, including the United States airstrikes, and more importantly the Somali citizens and nationalists were not fully supporting the government as they considered Ethiopian troops involvement as a foreign invasion," Nur said.

Omar Yusuf Abdulle, a Horn of Africa affairs analyst, believes that the dream of al-Shabab -- taking control of Somalia, overthrowing the western-backed government and imposing a strict version of Sharia law -- is over. He cautions that the militant group will remain a security threat for many years to come because the group's ideology alone is enough to inspire attacks.

"Despite the recent military defeat, the group can still do damage because their leaders are still out there, and they still control large territory in southern Somalia. Also, the die-hard followers of the group are still listening to them and there are probably thousands of them; therefore, the complete defeat of al-Shabab depends on the eradication of the ideology that inspires the terrorist," Abdulle said.

The Somalia government also acknowledges that the dangerous ideology is very much alive and expects to see more terrorist attacks planned and commissioned by the group.

In its war against the group's ideology, as a part of the government's triple offensive against al-Shabab -- which includes military and financial operations in addition to countering extremist propaganda -- the

	<p>government convened a four-day conference this week of Muslim scholars in Mogadishu that ended Thursday with the formation of a Supreme Council.</p> <p>More than 300 Muslim clerics who attended the meeting declared their support for the government's war against the Islamist militant group, which has been fighting the government since 2007. The clerics vehemently denounced al-Shabab's misinterpretation of Islam.</p> <p>It was the first time in years that Somali clerics from all sects of Islam came together to denounce terrorism. Even the conservative Wahhabi sect, which has been accused of sympathizing with al-Shabab, participated.</p> <p>Somali Prime Minister Hamza Barre said in his closing speech at the conference that the coming together of Somali clerics from different ideological persuasions could be the end of al-Shabab's religious influence in Somalia.</p> <p>"This will be instrumental in winning the war against al-Shabab and other extremist elements because it is the first time we have seen different sects of clerics sitting together and issuing a statement together against a common enemy. I am happy that you have joined the fight," he said.</p> <p>Last year, Barre named the former deputy leader of al-Shabab, Mukhtar Robow, as religious affairs minister. His selection was seen as an attempt to deflate al-Shabab's ideology.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 New York's worst terror attack since 9/11
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/29/sayfullo-saipov-trial-portrait
GIST	<p>On 31 October 2017, Sayfullo Saipov went to a Home Depot in New Jersey and rented a truck. Saipov, who at the time was 29, then drove into Manhattan, traveling south on the West Side highway, as countless motorists have done without incident.</p> <p>But as Saipov approached Houston Street, he hit the gas, speeding onto a bike path alongside the Hudson River. He smashed into cyclists and pedestrians, killing eight people – the worst terror attack in New York since 9/11.</p> <p>Saipov's rampage concluded only when he smashed into the side of a schoolbus. He then bounded out of the "smoking ruin" that remained of his truck and screamed "Allahu Akbar", a phrase often invoked by members of the Islamic State (IS) carrying out terrorist attacks, prosecutors said.</p> <p>He toted two guns – which turned out to be fakes – and aimed them at a police officer who had rushed to the grisly scene. The officer fired his gun at Saipov, who was struck and fell to the ground.</p> <p>At the hospital following his arrest, Saipov gave a "proud confession" and "smiled" about the carnage; he even "asked for an ISIS flag to hang in his hospital room", prosecutors said.</p> <p>Saipov, who was found guilty this week in his Manhattan federal court trial, did not deny that he carried out this attack. Nor did his attorneys. But Saipov's relationship to the crimes he committed was arguably the key dispute in this case – and could well decide whether he lives or dies when he is sentenced after his conviction.</p> <p>The trial that unfolded in New York over the past few weeks has cast a spotlight on Saipov's path to radicalisation – tracing a process that turned an apparently-normal seeming immigrant into someone willing and able to wreak carnage and murder on his adopted home</p> <p>Prosecutors have contended that Saipov "killed to become a member of ISIS and he did it right here in New York". Saipov's defense contends that he might have been inspired by IS, but did not want to become a member, in an effort to argue that he's not guilty of the capital counts within his lengthy indictment.</p>

Saipov was convicted of capital counts and now the trial will move into the death penalty phase, and jurors will decide whether to hand down this punishment.

In making this argument about inspiration versus membership, Saipov's defense has provided a chronology of radicalization – and how one immigrant's pursuit of the American dream went terribly awry as conspiracy theories and loneliness took hold.

Saipov was born in Uzbekistan, when the central Asian nation remained part of the USSR. During Soviet control of Uzbekistan, religion was effectively barred.

Saipov grew up in a Muslim family but it was not a religious upbringing. There were Islamic greetings and pre-meal prayers, but he neither attended mosque nor studied the religion, his lead attorney, David Patton, told jurors in his opening.

Saipov's father and uncle traveled to the US when he was a teenager. They worked in construction and returned to Uzbekistan when Saipov was 21.

At the time, Saipov was working as a bank clerk and completing his schooling. He applied for a US work visa and came to the country in 2010, at age 22.

Saipov lived in Ohio and while he didn't have friends or relatives there, he was connected to the Uzbek community through family acquaintances. Within months, he landed a job as a long-haul truck driver.

Saipov wed in 2012. It was an arranged marriage, as common under Uzbek custom. In spring of 2017, they moved to Paterson, New Jersey, and had three children. He started driving for Uber, Patton said.

While the chronology of Saipov's life in the US seemed like that of so many other immigrants who toil for hours in grueling jobs, his line of work and resulting lifestyle fostered susceptibility to extremism, Patton argued.

"In the years since leaving Uzbekistan, Mr Saipov's life had changed dramatically. He went from constantly being surrounded by a large extended family to spending most of his days on the road crossing the country on long-haul trips driving a tractor-trailer," Patton said. "It was during those years that he became introduced to an extremist strain of Islam and ultimately to ISIS."

"He was drawn into an online world of grievance and conspiracy, conspiracy theories," Patton said. He was swayed by IS's extensive messaging, much of which was produced to look like legitimate, informative news programming.

Patton insisted, however, that Saipov was not a member of IS – nor did he want to become one. "The fact is Mr Saipov committed this attack without any real connection other than being inspired by it, by the messaging online in these chat groups and all sorts of other ways," he argued.

"He watched hours and hours of video and audio and consumed other material, and was convinced that ISIS was fighting for a righteous cause and that they were right in their version of Islam, and that in fact it was God's will that he should become a martyr and commit an attack, be a mujahideen, a warrior for Islam."

The fact that Saipov wanted to be a "martyr" – and die for his cause – also undermined any alleged desire to join IS, Patton contended.

"He expected to die, not join an organization. He was steeped in IS propaganda. He bought into all these notions of the caliphate and that it was a religious obligation for him to become a martyr and ascend to paradise," Patton said in his closing argument this week. "He didn't expect to be here before all of you and he didn't expect to be joining any organization."

	<p>Ron Kuby, a veteran criminal defense attorney with a focus on civil rights, explained that in a capital case where there's little doubt of a defendant's guilt, an attorney's focus on their life and motives has a singular goal.</p> <p>"Everything in the case is about don't kill him," Kuby said of defense strategy in death penalty cases where culpability isn't disputed.</p> <p>"While the penalty phase is separate from the guilt and innocence phase, as a practical matter, if you're a defense lawyer, you want to elicit anything and everything during the guilt and innocence phase that in some way would mitigate the horror of the crime," Kuby said.</p> <p>"If you can establish that the defendant was a normal person, who did normal person things, prior to him becoming radicalized, and you can show the unique circumstances that led to his radicalization, you can hope to argue to the jury that the man is not without the possibility of human redemption."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 British soldier faces terrorism charges
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/28/europe/british-army-serviceman-terrorism-charges-intl-hnk/index.html
GIST	<p>A British serviceman has been charged with terrorism and explosives offenses, the London Metropolitan Police said Friday.</p> <p>Daniel Abed Khalife, 21, from Beaconside, Stafford, was charged after an investigation by the Met's Terrorism Command, concerning two incidents in Staffordshire in August 2021 and earlier this month, police said.</p> <p>Khalife was charged with eliciting or attempting to elicit "information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism," in August 2021 and placing an article "with the intention of inducing in another a belief that the said article was likely to explode or ignite and thereby cause personal injury or damage to property" on or before January 2, according to the Met.</p> <p>He is currently in police custody and "is due to appear at Westminster Magistrates' Court on 28 January," the Met said.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/29 East coast cities: where is the snow?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/where-is-the-snow-new-york-city-shatters-50-year-record-for-snowless-winter-11674933503?mod=hp_listb_pos2
GIST	<p>In New York, a mystery has captivated the city: Where is the snow?</p> <p>It hasn't snowed across New York City in 326 days, meteorologists say, dashing dreams of a white Christmas, sledding in the park or building a snowman.</p> <p>The city broke the record on Sunday for the longest start to a winter without snow, according to the National Weather Service. The 1973 winter had set the record, when it didn't snow until Jan. 29. The agency's snowfall records date to 1869.</p> <p>New Yorkers typically dust off their snow boots by the middle of December, when the city often gets its first snowfall, according to the agency.</p>

Instead of snow this winter, there has been plenty of rain and drizzles, forcing New Yorkers to swap their snow boots for umbrellas. Some residents have been anticipating their first flurries while others are looking forward to a cozy snow day.

Other East Coast cities are also setting records for snowless winters, including Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., according to the National Weather Service.

Danielle Leong, 35 years old, has been waiting her whole life for what she called “the quintessential New York winter experience.” She moved to Brooklyn from California last year.

“I was excited for my first white Christmas and that did not happen,” said Ms. Leong, a vice president of engineering at a startup.

She said she hasn’t mailed out her Christmas cards yet because she is waiting to take pictures in the snow. As soon as it snows, she said she plans to run outside, jump around and make a snowball.

Meteorologists say there isn’t one particular reason why people like Ms. Leong haven’t seen any snow in New York this winter.

“We just haven’t been in a favorable pattern for it this year,” said James Tomasini, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in New York. He added that last winter it snowed on Christmas Eve.

The weather in New York City this winter has been warmer than normal, reaching 57 degrees on Thursday. The no-snow streak means the city hasn’t needed to bring out its snowplows. And city traffic, already a nightmare sometimes, hasn’t gotten jammed by a snowstorm.

Cary Candelario, a 44-year-old stay-at-home mother, said she is sad it hasn’t snowed yet. She lives in Manhattan and looks forward to the snowfall every year.

“It just feels weird,” she said of the weather recently. “It feels off.”

There have been traces of snow in the New York City area this winter, Mr. Tomasini said. Still, the snowflakes weren’t enough to count as a measurable snowfall, which meteorologists say is at least 0.1 inch.

Mr. Tomasini said there was a light dusting of snow on Dec. 11 and Dec. 12 near LaGuardia Airport in Queens.

Not all of the region has been spared from snow, however. It snowed on Wednesday in some areas outside New York City. Central Park in Manhattan got a few snowflakes then too, meteorologists said.

Some parts of the state have been hit hard. A fierce winter storm around Christmastime in Buffalo killed dozens and brought the area to a standstill.

Sydney Vasquez, 27 years old, said she is looking forward to her next snow day. She plans to stay home in the Bronx and take her dogs, Nico and Mia, outside to play.

She wishes it would just snow already. She said she wants a rest from driving to her job as a middle school special-education teacher.

“I need a break,” she said, “so I’m hoping that it snows and I get a remote day.”

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HEADLINE	01/29 Work absence from illness at record high
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/29/covid-absence-workforce-health-long-covid

For many Americans it feels like everyone is out sick right now. But there is a good reason: work absences from illness are at an all-time annual high in the US and show few signs of relenting. And it's not just acute illness and caregiving duties keeping workers away.

About 1.5 million Americans [missed work](#) because of sickness in December. Each month, more than a million people have called out sick for the past three years. About 7% of Americans currently have long Covid, which can affect productivity and ability to work, [according](#) to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The last time the absentee number dipped below a million Americans was in November 2019.

Last year, the trend accelerated rather than returning to normal. In 2022, workers had the most sickness-related absences of the pandemic, and the highest number since record-keeping began in 1976.

In 2022, the average was 1.58 million per month, for a total of 19 million absences for the year. The largest spike was in January 2022, when 3.6 million people were absent due to illness, about triple the pre-pandemic number for that month.

Parents and caregivers also saw the [highest rates](#) of childcare-related absences of the entire pandemic in October 2022 as illnesses surged amid relaxed precautions and lower vaccination rates among children.

Patterns in absenteeism [correspond](#) with rises and falls in the spread of Covid. But long Covid is probably contributing to sick leave rates as well.

One [analysis](#) in New York found that 71% of long Covid patients who filed for worker's compensation still had symptoms requiring medical attention or were unable to work completely for at least six months. Two in five returned to work within two months, but still needed medical treatment. Nearly one in five (18%) of claimants with long Covid could not return to work for a year or longer after first getting sick. The majority were under the age of 60.

Workforce participation has dropped by about 500,000 people because of Covid, according to one [study](#) that looked over time at workers who were out sick for a week. But the actual number could be higher, because not all workers are able to take time off during their illnesses, Bach said.

"It's likely that long Covid is keeping somewhere around 500,000 to a million full-time-equivalent workers out of work," said Katie Bach, a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Some affected by long Covid have reduced their hours, while others have left the workforce temporarily or permanently – a metric not captured by work absence data, but calculated in labor participation statistics.

Patients who are very sick with long Covid often "try to work for some amount of time and then eventually they drop out", Bach said.

Between death and disability, the workforce has been reduced by as much as 2.6% during the pandemic, with 1bn days of work lost, McKinsey recently reported.

Those who stay in their jobs may need more sick leave than before because of new chronic illnesses.

"People who are on the less-sick end of long Covid, maybe they can keep working, but every now and then they might need a day or two off just because they have overdone it or something happened that triggered a symptom flare," Bach said.

Nearly one in five Americans developed long Covid after their initial infection, with some 7.5% of all American adults currently experiencing long Covid, according to the CDC. The CDC began collecting data on how many people have long Covid in 2022.

Much more research still needs to be done on the causes of and treatments for long Covid, the researchers said. Some patients do eventually recover, for instance, but it's not clear why or how long they will be sick.

"We don't know how long it's taking them to recover. There's a lot of uncertainty there," said Alice Burns, associate director of the program on Medicaid and the uninsured at the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The more immunity people have, from vaccines and recovery from prior cases, the less likely they are to get sick in the first place, which reduces the risk of developing long Covid. But it is still possible to have long Covid even after mild or asymptomatic infection.

All of this means the US may continue to see higher-than-normal workplace absences.

"Some people just really need flexibility from their employers," Burns said. That can include telework, unscheduled leave, flexible schedules and reduced hours.

"The challenge with that is, those supports are a lot more likely to be available to workers who have office jobs, higher-paying jobs, who are pretty well-established in the labor market," Burns said.

"Covid in general, and long Covid too, are more likely to affect people who are minorities, who have lower levels of education, [who have] likely lower levels of income. So there may be, for many people, a mismatch between the people who need some of these employment-related supports and the types of jobs they are in."

Employers can adjust to this new normal by offering as many accommodations as possible, both for those suffering initial bouts of Covid infection and those experiencing longer-term symptoms, Bach said. Again, some of the jobs where people are most at risk might be the least accommodating – it's usually easier for office workers to telecommute than it is for fast-food workers – but there are still steps employers can take.

"Companies have to get creative, like: can we offer more frequent breaks?" Bach said. "Can we as a society convince Medicare and Medicaid to reimburse a little bit more where companies are employing people with long Covid? What memory aids can we put together?"

If long Covid continues to affect 7% of the country, that's 23 million people at any given time who may require accommodations under laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"But there isn't a lot of clarity about what is a reasonable accommodation" under the law when it comes to Covid and long Covid, Burns said.

While Covid has thrown the country into disarray in every realm, including work, it is also shining a more intense light on the ways chronic illness affects productivity and workforce participation – a change that disability and chronic illness activists say is long overdue, Bach pointed out.

"My hope is that it's big enough that we can rethink how we research and treat these diseases, and how we approach workplace accommodation," Bach said. "In a world where any of your workers could suddenly become disabled, I think you have to be more flexible."

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HEADLINE	01/29 El Nino transition lead to global heat?
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/el-nino-2023-record-heat-worldwide
GIST	When the world's largest and deepest ocean basin warms, satellites will be busy over the Pacific Ocean detecting analogous water temperatures but also, if history repeats itself, landmasses across the globe will have to deal with heat that could be record-breaking.

Since reliable technology started keeping track of world temperatures in the 1950s, the warmest year of any decade were periods dominated by an El Niño event, and the coldest were from [La Niñas](#).

"During El Niño, unusually warm sea surface temperatures in the central/eastern tropical Pacific lead to increased evaporation and cooling of the ocean. At the same time, the increased cloudiness blocks more sunlight from entering the ocean. When water vapor condenses and forms clouds, heat is released into the atmosphere. So, during El Niño, there is less heating of the ocean and more heating of the atmosphere than normal," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration experts wrote in a [2022 ENSO blog](#).

The world's last El Niño ended nearly four years ago, but it's the event of 2015-16 that holds records for not only being one of the strongest El Niños on record but also causing the world's warmest temperatures. The year 2016 ended with temperatures around 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit above normal, making it the warmest period on record. During the dog days of summer, [more than 124 million people were under extreme heat warnings in the U.S.](#) as communities from the Southwest to the Southeast reported record heat.

Uncertainty lies ahead, but signs point to continued warmth

The globe is currently still in a La Niña, which is expected to end in the coming months.

The climate pattern has been in control of weather for three years and made history by becoming the [first triple-dip La Niña of the 21st century](#).

Also, during this phase, [NOAA reported](#) the world experienced some of its warmest temperatures ever, despite the pattern being known for its cooling effect.

The base mark of near-record heat has some climatologists concerned that once an El Niño is able to shake off the lagging effects of La Niña, temperatures could be off to the races and reach levels never seen before.

"The ongoing La Niña may prevent global average temperature from breaking the record in 2023, but greenhouse gas-induced global warming grows steadily in magnitude. In fact, it most likely helped 2020, a year of La Niña, to tie the all-time high of 2016, a year following a major El Niño," Shang-Ping Xie, a climate dynamicist at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, [wrote in an ENSO discussion](#).

Computer model guidance shows a trend towards the El Niño state, especially in the latter half of 2023 and possibly continuing into 2024.

If history repeats itself, a protracted El Niño episode could result in warm, if not record-breaking, temperatures.

Significant questions remain on exactly when the world reaches the neutral state and begins the trek through El Niño. Some climate models prematurely killed off the current La Niña during its three-year stretch, so the exact timeframe of transition is not set in stone.

The rarity of a stubborn La Niña state and global temperatures that haven't declined as readily as during past events, has some experts pointing to climate change as playing an increasingly pivotal role in patterns.

NOAA experts admit what is complicating outlooks are climate change's influences on Pacific wind and water temperature patterns or what is known as the El Niño-Southern Oscillation.

"If temperatures warm faster in the western Pacific than in the eastern Pacific, the background tropical circulation could become more La Niña-like. But if the trend pattern changes as global temperatures continue to rise, meaning the east starts warming faster than the west in the future, the whole circulation across the tropical Pacific could become more El Niño-like," Michelle L'Heureux, a scientist at NOAA's Climate Prediction Center, [posted in a recent blog](#).

HEADLINE	01/28 Hinman Glacier melts away: climate change
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/seattle-washington-climate-and-environment-glaciers-7728bc6812f45a76ac15deb406624e0e
GIST	<p>SEATTLE (AP) — The largest glacier between the high peaks of Mount Rainier and Glacier Peak has melted away after a long battle with global warming.</p> <p>For thousands of years, the Hinman Glacier graced the crest of the Washington Cascades in what is now King County.</p> <p>Fifty miles due east of downtown Seattle, Mount Hinman sits deep in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, midway between Snoqualmie Pass and Stevens Pass.</p> <p>Nichols College glaciologist Mauri Pelto led a team to Mount Hinman in August 2022, as he has most summers since 1984. This time, they found its namesake glacier was no more.</p> <p>In its place were just a few stranded patches of snow and ice.</p> <p>“This is the biggest North Cascade glacier to completely disappear,” Pelto told KUOW. “I’ve seen a bunch of small glaciers disappear, and to see one of the larger glaciers disappear is more striking.”</p> <p>Until recently, the Hinman was one of four named glaciers that provided cool water to the Skykomish River in the hottest, driest time of the year.</p> <p>The glaciers of the Skykomish basin have lost 55% of their surface area since the 1950s, according to Pelto.</p> <p>“What that means is, you have 55% less of an ice cube there to melt all summer long,” Pelto said.</p> <p>As the Hinman dwindled to almost nothing in recent decades, late-summer flows got lower in the Skykomish River, bad news for salmon and farmers.</p> <p>The Hinman Glacier was ancient, though how ancient is unknown. It might date from the retreat of the Cordilleran ice sheet, which left glaciers atop the Cascades and Olympics 14,000 years ago. Pelto said there is strong evidence that the Hinman was older than the explosion of Mount Mazama, which created Oregon’s Crater Lake, 7,000 years ago.</p> <p>In the 1950s, the Hinman Glacier flowed a mile and a half from the broad top of 7,492-foot Mount Hinman to the valley floor nearly 2,000 feet below.</p> <p>Mount Hinman and its neighbors gained protection from direct human disturbance in 1976 when they were designated part of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. But that designation couldn’t protect Hinman’s snow and ice from a warming climate: They were no match for the rising temperatures of the fossil fuel era.</p> <p>“Once the largest glacier between Mount Rainier and Glacier Peak,” mountain climber and guidebook author Fred Beckey wrote in the 2000 edition of his Cascade Alpine Guide, “the Hinman Glacier has separated into three masses, with a greatly diminished area.”</p> <p>In 1958, the Hinman Glacier covered 320 acres, about half the size of Seattle’s Lake Union. In August 2022, the biggest patch of ice Pelto’s team found was about 10 acres—too small and too thin to flow, the defining characteristic of the moving ice masses called glaciers.</p> <p>Glaciers are rivers of ice. They flow from year to year, as their own weight compresses snow into ice, and generate striking features like deep crevasses and deep-blue ice, sculpting the land beneath them as they go.</p>

	<p>Another glacier on Mount Hinman, the Lower Foss, preceded the Hinman into oblivion, while one other, the Foss, remains, though it has shrunk by 70% since the 1950s.</p> <p>The rounded peak and the glacier on its northwest side were named for Everett dentist and mountain climber Harry B. Hinman in 1934. He started the Everett branch of the Mountaineers in 1911.</p> <p>Few people ever touched the Hinman Glacier, reachable only by off-trail scrambling and mountaineering deep inside the rugged Alpine Lakes Wilderness.</p> <p>But the Hinman touched many people by keeping the Skykomish River cool and flowing each summer and providing water for fish and farmers when they needed it most.</p> <p>RIP (rest in precipitation), Hinman Glacier.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Australia: missing radioactive capsule
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/28/australia/radioactive-capsule-missing-western-australia-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Officials have warned the public of the risks in touching a small capsule containing a radioactive substance that was lost during transportation in Western Australia.</p> <p>The silver, round capsule, which measures about a quarter of an inch in diameter and is about a third of an inch tall, contains a small quantity of radioactive Caesium-137, a substance used within gauges in mining operations. Australia's Department of Health has warned of the material's serious health consequences.</p> <p>The capsule left a mine site north of the town of Newman by road on January 12, according to a statement released by Western Australia's Department of Fire & Emergency Services (DFES) on Saturday.</p> <p>It was being sent to the northeastern suburbs of Perth for repairs. The package holding the capsule arrived in Perth on January 16 and was unloaded and kept in a secure radiation store.</p> <p>However, when the package was opened for inspection on Wednesday, the gauge was found to be broken apart with screws missing – and the capsule was not there.</p> <p>Western Australia police notified DFES and the Hazard Management Agency that evening. A search is underway to find the capsule and safely contain it, according to DFES Country North chief superintendent David Gill.</p> <p>“A multi-agency Incident Management Team, comprised of DFES, Department of Health, WA Police and other subject matter experts, are confirming the exact route and stops made during the journey from north of Newman,” he said in a statement on Friday.</p> <p>“The start and finish of the transportation journey – the mine site north of Newman and the transport depot in the north-eastern suburbs of Perth – were among the locations searched” on Thursday and Friday, he added. “We are also combing roads and other areas in the search zone.”</p> <p>‘Do not touch it’</p> <p>The emergency services warned of a radioactive substance risk in parts of the Pilbara, Midwest Gascoyne, Goldfields-Midlands and Perth Metropolitan regions.</p> <p>Exposure to Caesium-137 could cause radiation burns or radiation sickness. However, risk to the general community is relatively low, officials said.</p> <p>“If people see the capsule or something that looks similar, stay away from it and keep others away from it too,” said Dr. Andrew Robertson, chief health officer and Radiological Council chair, in a statement on Friday.</p>

“Do not touch or pick it up. The public is asked to report it immediately by calling 13 DFES (13 33 37),” he added, advising anyone who touches or goes close to the material for a long period of time to seek medical care.

“If you are very close to the material or touching it, the radiation risk increases immensely and could cause serious damage to your health, including causing radiation burns to the skin,” Robertson said.

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HEADLINE	01/27 Auto insurers stop Kia, Hyundai policies
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/27/business/progressive-state-farm-hyundai-kia/index.html
GIST	<p>Progressive and State Farm, two of America’s largest auto insurers, are refusing to write policies in certain cities for some older Hyundai and Kia models that have been deemed too easy to steal, according to the companies.</p> <p>Several reports say the companies have stopped offering insurance on these vehicles in cities that include Denver, Colorado and St. Louis, Missouri. The insurance companies did not tell CNN which cities or states were involved.</p> <p>The Highway Loss Data Institute released insurance claims data last September that confirmed what various social media accounts had been saying: Some 2015 through 2019 Hyundai and Kia models are roughly twice as likely to be stolen as other vehicles of similar age, because many of them lack some of the basic auto theft prevention technology included in most other vehicles in those years, according to the HLDI.</p> <p>Specifically, these SUVs and cars don’t have electronic immobilizers, which rely on a computer chip in the car and another in the key that communicate to confirm that the key really belongs to that vehicle. Without the right key, an immobilizer should do just that – stop the car from moving.</p> <p>Immobilizers were standard equipment on 96% of vehicles sold for the 2015-2019 model years, according to the HLDI, but only 26% of Hyundais and Kias had them at that time. Vehicles that have push-button start systems, rather than relying on metal keys that must be inserted and turned, have immobilizers, but not all models with turn-key ignitions do.</p> <p>Stealing these vehicles became a social media trend in 2021, according to HLDI, as car thieves began posting videos of their thefts and joyrides and even videos explaining how to steal the cars. In Wisconsin, where the crimes first became prevalent, theft claims of Hyundais and Kias spiked to more than 30 times 2019 levels in dollar terms.</p> <p>“State Farm has temporarily stopped writing new business in some states for certain model years and trim levels of Hyundai and Kia vehicles because theft losses for these vehicles have increased dramatically,” the insurer said in a statement provided to CNN. “This is a serious problem impacting our customers and the entire auto insurance industry.”</p> <p>Progressive is also cutting back on insuring these cars in some markets, spokesman Jeff Sibel said in an emailed statement.</p> <p>“During the past year we’ve seen theft rates for certain Hyundai and Kia vehicles more than triple and in some markets these vehicles are almost 20 times more likely to be stolen than other vehicles,” he wrote. “Given that we price our policies based on the level of risk they represent, this explosive increase in thefts in many cases makes these vehicles extremely challenging for us to insure. In response, in some geographic areas we have increased our rates and limited our sale of new insurance policies on some of these models.”</p>

	<p>Progressive continues to insure those who already have policies with the company, he said. Progressive is also providing them with advice on how to protect their vehicles from theft.</p> <p>Michael Barry, a spokesman for the Insurance Information Institute, said it was very unusual for auto insurers to simply stop writing new policies on a given make or model of vehicle.</p> <p>"They generally want to expand their market share depending on where they're doing business," he said.</p> <p>Hyundai and Kia operate as separate companies in the United States, but Hyundai Motor Group owns a large stake in Kia and various Hyundai and Kia models share much of their engineering.</p> <p>Engine immobilizers are now standard on all Kia vehicles, according to a statement by the automaker and the company says it has been developing and testing security software for vehicles not originally equipped with an immobilize. Kia said it has begun notifying owners of the availability of this software, which is being provided at no charge.</p> <p>Hyundai said it is providing free steering wheel locks to some police departments around the country to give local residents who have easily stolen Hyundai models. Hyundai dealers are also installing free security kits for the vehicles, the company said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/30 South Africa: gunmen kill 8 at party
SOURCE	https://www.voanews.com/a/gunmen-kill-eight-at-birthday-party-in-south-africa-police/6939509.html
GIST	<p>JOHANNESBURG — Gunmen opened fire on a group of people celebrating a birthday at the weekend in a township in South Africa, killing eight and wounding three others, police said Monday.</p> <p>The birthday celebrant was among those gunned down in the mass shooting in the southern port city of Gqeberha, formerly Port Elizabeth.</p> <p>"The owner of the house was celebrating his birthday when two unknown gunmen entered the yard" on Sunday evening "and started shooting at the guests," police said in a statement.</p> <p>The gunmen "randomly shot at guests," police said, adding "eight people died while three others are still fighting for their lives in hospital. The home owner is among the deceased."</p> <p>The motive of the attack is yet unknown.</p> <p>Nomthetheleli Mene, the provincial police chief for the Eastern Cape province, condemned the killings as "a blatant disregard for human life."</p> <p>An investigation has been launched into the attack and police said a manhunt for the perpetrators was underway.</p> <p>Shootings are common in South Africa, which has one of the world's highest murder rates, fueled by gang violence and alcohol.</p> <p>South Africa last year saw string of shootings that killed nearly two dozen at separate bars in working class suburbs in Johannesburg and in the eastern city of Pietermaritzburg.</p> <p>Police Minister Bheki Cele, the national police commissioner Fannie Masemola, and crime experts were scheduled to visit the scene of the attack later Monday morning.</p>

HEADLINE	01/29 Toronto wave public transport violence
SOURCE	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-64408450
GIST	<p>Commuters in Toronto have been navigating the city's public transport system with growing unease, following a surge of violent incidents targeting both riders and operators.</p> <p>As of Friday, there were seven reported incidents of violence in the last seven days on the transport system of Canada's largest city.</p> <p>This includes a woman who was stabbed multiple times by a stranger on one of Toronto's iconic streetcars. The next day, a 16-year-old boy was stabbed in the torso on a bus.</p> <p>In another incident, a bus operator was shot with a BB gun by two teenagers. Four days later, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) said two other employees were chased by a person with a syringe at a subway station.</p> <p>The wave of seemingly random violence has alarmed residents, and has dominated the conversation in Toronto over the last week.</p> <p>"Every time I'm on the subway, I literally need to hide," said one Toronto woman in a TikTok posted on Thursday. "It's definitely scary, I'm concerned for my safety and (that of) others as well," said another in an interview with local news outlet BlogTo.</p> <p>On Thursday, the Toronto Police Service responded by announcing that it will deploy more officers to patrol transit stations. During the announcement, Police Chief Myron Demkiw stressed that Toronto remains a safe city.</p> <p>"A million people travel our city every day using (TTC) subways, streetcars, and buses, safely," he said.</p> <p>Recent reports show that this issue is not unique to Toronto. A similar surge of violence on transport systems has been observed throughout 2022 in cities across North America, including New York City, Chicago and Washington DC.</p> <p>How much has violence risen on public transit? The Toronto Star newspaper has reported that violent incidents on the city's transit system have gone up, even while ridership remains lower than pre-pandemic levels.</p> <p>In 2021, the paper reported that the TTC recorded 734 instances of violence against customers, including assault, sexual assault, robbery and harassment - a 10% increase from 2019.</p> <p>In the first half of 2022, the TTC reported 451 instances of violence, putting the year on track for a higher rate of violence than in 2021. Overall major crime in Toronto is up 3% from 2019, according to Toronto Police data.</p> <p>Violent incidents targeting operators also appear to be increasing. More than half of Toronto's transit workers said in a recent survey that they have experienced violence or harassment on the job.</p> <p>A similar issue has been observed in other cities like Edmonton and Vancouver, prompting the national union of transit workers to call for a task force to tackle violence against its members.</p> <p>In the US, cities across the country have also reported significant spikes in crimes on local transit systems.</p> <p>In New York City, statistics released in January show that subway crime alone rose 30% in 2022 compared to the previous year, despite the deployment of thousands of police officers.</p>

In Chicago, statistics show that the rate of violent crimes per million rides is double what it was pre-pandemic.

Raw number of violent crimes on the city's Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) in the first 11 months of 2022 stood at 591, compared to 489 in the same time period the previous year.

Officials have noted that ridership also grew during this time, meaning that the ratio of violent crimes per million rides actually fell slightly from 6.8 per million rides to 6.2.

What is contributing to the rise, and what can cities do to address it?

Experts have said that it is difficult to say definitively what is behind this rise, as each violent incident is unique. But the difficulties following the Covid-19 pandemic may play a role.

"Transit is a microcosm of the city, and we know that the pandemic shook something loose," Matti Siemiatycki, director of the Infrastructure Institute at the University of Toronto, told the BBC.

But Mr Siemiatycki noted that without more information on each incident and the perpetrators, it is tough to pinpoint the root cause of this violence.

Jerry Flores, a sociology professor at the University of Toronto and an expert on the escalation of violence, said incidents like these are often multifaceted without a single solution.

He said the pandemic has caused significant hardship for many people who have lost work or are struggling to make ends meet, and that people are still getting used to interacting with one another again as they emerge from isolation.

Public transit, Mr Flores added, "serves as a de facto respite location" for people experiencing distress, addiction and housing insecurity, due to lack of services elsewhere.

He said he believes some of the issues seen on public transit could be alleviated if "people's basic needs are met", and that policing alone may not solve the problem.

In Chicago, CTA president Dorval Carter suggested that rising crime rates are at least partly a function of decreased numbers of riders.

"Unfortunately, because there are fewer riders on the system, for a long stretch of time, this in turn has led some people to feel a little bit more emboldened to engage in unacceptable behaviour," he said.

Some commuters have suggested increasing the frequency of bus and subway arrivals as a solution, to help commuters avoid having to wait alone on platforms and at stations for extended periods of time.

Whatever the response may be, Mr Siemiatycki said it is vital for cities to act on this issue. "Transit is the lifeblood of a big city," he said, connecting people to their homes, jobs and broader community.

"Anything that puts transit at risk and causes riders to have second thoughts about using it, is really a risk to the systems themselves and the broader city as a whole."

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HEADLINE	01/28 Human trafficking aware: Lantern Rescue
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/human-trafficking/human-trafficking-awareness-interview-with-lantern-rescue/
GIST	Lantern Rescue is a U.S. based 501c3 non-profit organization that rescues exploited, persecuted, and displaced individuals and families. Lantern Rescue works domestically and internationally to create sustainable partnerships with local government entities, international organizations, and military and law enforcement personnel.

	<p>Ren is the Co-Founder and Vice President of Lantern Rescue, an international counter human trafficking non-profit organization. Lantern Rescue trains and equips foreign law enforcement teams to become counter-human trafficking task forces with the goal of liberating survivors of trafficking and seeking justice through prosecution of their traffickers. Lantern Rescue's mission of creating counter human trafficking task forces, organic to foreign law enforcement units, is driven by the ideology that no one is in a better position to change lives and mindsets than fellow countrymen of the survivors of trafficking. Lantern Rescue currently has active operations in 20 countries, while these operations are primarily focused on counter-trafficking efforts, Lantern Rescue also has a presence in the extraction and recovery of persecuted people and assisting in crisis and conflict issues that threaten religious and individual freedoms. Ren began her legal education in 2020 and will be graduating with her Juris Doctorate in May 2023. Ren has been working as a certified legal intern in her local District Attorney's Office since May of 2021 where she assists in the prosecution of CSAM, human trafficking, and other sex crimes. Ren also works on appeals to prevent the overturning of convictions of sex crimes, CSAM, and human trafficking.</p>
Return to Top	<i>Click on source link to view YouTube video: Human Trafficking Awareness-Meet Lantern Rescue</i>

HEADLINE	01/28 OR torture suspect luring via dating apps
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/28/oregon-torture-grants-pass-dating-apps
GIST	<p>Oregon police are currently on the hunt for a suspect who has been accused of torturing a woman, warning that he is currently using dating apps in attempts to find individuals who can assist him in avoiding authorities and securing more victims.</p> <p>On Friday, Grants Pass police in south-west Oregon announced in a news release that they are searching for 36-year-old Benjamin Obadiah Foster who is wanted for attempted murder, kidnapping and assault. The manhunt for Foster follows the discovery by Grants Pass police officers on Tuesday of a female victim found at a residence, bound, severely beaten and unconscious. The victim was hospitalized in critical condition.</p> <p>The suspect fled the scene before officers arrived but “was positively identified as Benjamin Obadiah Foster of Wolf Creek,” police said. Less than two years ago, Foster had been convicted in Nevada of capturing another woman and detaining her for weeks.</p> <p>Prior to moving to Oregon, Foster held his then-girlfriend captive inside her Las Vegas apartment for two weeks in 2019, the Associated Press reports. According to a Las Vegas police report reviewed by the outlet, the woman suffered seven broken ribs, two black eyes and injuries from being bound at the wrist and ankles with zip ties and duct tape.</p> <p>In addition, the woman told police that she was forced to eat lye and was choked to the point of unconsciousness. She was eventually able to escape Foster during a trip to the grocery store and gas station.</p> <p>Foster was charged with multiple felonies, including assault and battery, and faced decades in prison upon conviction. However, Foster accepted a plea deal in August 2021 that allowed him to plead guilty to one felony count of battery and a misdemeanor count of battery constituting domestic violence.</p> <p>He was sentenced to two and a half years. However, because the 729 days he spent in jail while awaiting trial was included in his punishment, Foster had less than 200 days to serve in state custody, the Associated Press reports.</p> <p>In a statement to the outlet, Grants Pass police chief Warren Hensman said that he found it “extremely troubling” that Foster is currently wanted for attempted murder rather than in jail for his previous crimes.</p> <p>“We are laser-focused on capturing this man and bringing him to justice,” Hensman told reporters on Thursday, adding, “This is an all-hands-on-deck operation.”</p>

	<p>Joshua Eastman, Josephine county district attorney, wrote in a court document reviewed by the Associated Press that Foster had attempted to kill the victim found in Grants Pass while “intentionally torturing her” and concealing her “in a place where she was not likely to be found”.</p> <p>On Thursday evening, Grants Pass police, Oregon state police SWAT team, sheriff’s deputies and federal agents searched a property in Wolf Creek, a community that is a few miles north of Grants Pass. Foster “evaded capture and likely received assistance in fleeing the area,” said police.</p> <p>Nevertheless, they seized numerous pieces of evidence, including Foster’s 2008 Nissan Sentra. Additionally, authorities arrested a 68-year old woman for hindering prosecution.</p> <p>According to court documents reviewed by the Associated Press, the woman, Tina Marie Jones, followed Foster into a vehicle earlier on Thursday. Foster then proceeded to drive his Nissan Sentra over an embankment. The woman then gave Foster a ride to the property that was searched by police on Thursday night.</p> <p>Foster has been warned to be “actively using online dating applications to contact unsuspecting individuals who may be lured into assisting with the suspect’s escape or potentially as additional victims”, police said.</p> <p>As police continue to search for Foster, they have put up a \$2,500 reward for anybody who may lead authorities to Foster’s arrest and prosecution.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 Fla. cops charged: beating homeless man
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/29/florida-officers-kidnap-assault-homeless-man
GIST	<p>Two Florida police officers are facing armed kidnapping and battery charges for allegedly assaulting a homeless man after handcuffing him without reason, and taking him to an “isolated” location where they beat him unconscious.</p> <p>The news has emerged as America is grappling with a reckoning over abusive policing in the US following the beating to death of Tyre Nichols in Memphis, Tennessee. Video of the beating of the 29-year-old Black motorist shocked the US and the world when it was released on Friday. Five officers have been charged with his murder.</p> <p>Now Florida prosecutors say that on 17 December, officers Rafael Otano and Lorenzo Orfila of Hialeah city in Miami-Dade county handcuffed 50-year-old Jose Ortega Gutierrez, a homeless man who was known in the area. Surveillance cameras in the area around did not show any behavior by Gutierrez that would warrant an arrest.</p> <p>The officers then drove him to a “dark” and “isolated” spot six miles away, blasting their emergency lights on the way. They allegedly threw Gutierrez on the ground and beat him. He later woke up without cuffs, bleeding from his head.</p> <p>He was eventually able to find help through an off-duty police officer who was walking his dog and called 911 for him.</p> <p>Orfila reportedly called one of the responding officers to ask about Gutierrez’s condition and asked him to write up the 911 call as “no report”.</p> <p>The incident soon led to an internal investigation.</p> <p>A few days later, Ali Amin Saleh, 45, allegedly approached Gutierrez and offered him \$1,200, persuading him into signing an affidavit claiming the officers did not assault him.</p> <p>Gutierrez, who does not know how to read and was not informed what was in the statement, said he signed the paper because he needed the money.</p>

	<p>Saleh was charged with tampering with the victim. Orfila, who was the one to handcuff Gutierrez, was also charged with official misconduct.</p> <p>The charges were announced on Thursday by Miami-Dade state attorney Katherine Fernandez Rundle who condemned their actions, and said: “We will not allow rogue police officers to abuse their powers and to betray the public that they serve.”</p> <p>The officers were fired on Thursday, and taken into the Miami-Dade jail. They have been denied bail by a judge.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/29 NJ police: firebomb thrown at synagogue
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/29/nyregion/arson-temple-ner-tamid-new-jersey.html
GIST	<p>A man wearing a ski mask lit the wick of a Molotov cocktail and hurled it at the front door of a synagogue in Bloomfield, N.J., early on Sunday morning, the latest episode in an uptick of harassment and violence targeting Jews and Jewish institutions, the authorities said.</p> <p>The Molotov cocktail’s bottle broke, and the synagogue, Temple Ner Tamid, was undamaged, the Bloomfield Police Department said in a news release.</p> <p>The man was wearing black clothing, including a shirt that appeared to have a skull and crossbones design on it, according to the synagogue’s surveillance footage. The police said the man “fled down the driveway,” though it was unclear if he got away on foot or by car.</p> <p>About six hours after the 3:19 a.m. attack, temple staff members discovered what had happened and notified the police. The synagogue said in a statement that the fire went out on impact and that the door was secure.</p> <p>All scheduled activities on Sunday were canceled, and the synagogue said it expected an ongoing and heightened police presence in the coming days.</p> <p>Marc Katz, the temple’s rabbi, said in the statement that the synagogue has and “will continue to do everything in our power to keep our community safe.”</p> <p>“Everything worked as it should,” he said. “Our cameras recorded the incident, and our shatter-resistant doors held.”</p> <p>A separate investigation was opened into “a possible bias-motivated incident” at Trinity Episcopal Church in Asbury Park, N.J., the Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office said in a statement. The incident, which was not described in detail, took place during an antiracism event on Friday night, the prosecutor’s office said. No injuries were reported.</p> <p>The church could not be immediately reached on Sunday.</p> <p>The state attorney general, Matthew J. Platkin, said in a statement that his office was also made aware of the attack on the church. He did not offer details or say whether the attacks were linked.</p> <p>“We are cognizant of the fact that these attacks have occurred while violence continues to erupt in Israel, and while our own nation reckons with violence at home,” he said.</p> <p>Michael Venezia, the mayor of Bloomfield, a township about eight miles north of Newark, said on Facebook that “hate and antisemitism will not be tolerated and have no place in our welcoming community.”</p>

The Anti-Defamation League of New York and New Jersey said in a joint statement issued with partner organizations that the attempted arson at Temple Ner Tamid came amid a “spike in antisemitic incidents” and recent threats at synagogues in New Jersey.

In November, an 18-year-old man from Middlesex County, N.J., was charged with threatening to attack a synagogue and Jews that month. The episode prompted a rare warning from the Federal Bureau of Investigation in New Jersey of a broad threat to synagogues in the state.

Since a spate of bomb threats starting in 2017, synagogues have fortified their physical infrastructure with shatter-resistant windows, more security cameras and controlled access to buildings, said Bob Wilson, chief security officer for the Jewish Federation of Greater MetroWest NJ, who oversees training on how to best respond to threats.

“We’re just trying to make that security piece an integral part of much of what they do — not to be scared, but to be prepared,” he said.

In 2021, the Anti-Defamation League recorded 370 antisemitic incidents in New Jersey, representing the highest number ever recorded by the organization for the state — and the second-highest total recorded across the country that year.

Figures from 2022 are not yet available, but they will not show a decrease, said Scott Richman, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League of New York and New Jersey.

“Antisemitism is on the rise,” Mr. Richman said. “We are not in a vacuum here. Jews are not alone in this. It’s not just antisemitism. It’s about hate. We are one of the victims.”

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HEADLINE	01/27 Auburn, Renton car thefts spike
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/car-thefts-auburn-alone-hits-120-january/TXOG2QEL2BCB7AWRIZHQKYPYWQ/
GIST	<p>A rash of stolen cars is prompting neighbors to take action on their own. So far this month, 120 have been reported stolen in Auburn, according to Auburn police. A spokesperson said car thefts in the triple-digits has been the new norm for months.</p> <p><u>The situation is similar in Renton.</u> Police said on Friday that they’ve had 39 reported vehicle thefts and attempted thefts over the past four days alone.</p> <p>Renton resident Kaydra Kerr had her Hyundai stolen on Wednesday. It was found on Thursday by a passerby who noticed the car in an alley with all the windows down. By Friday, it was in a tow yard.</p> <p>“It’s extremely frustrating,” Kerr said. Whoever smashed her window used the viral TikTok phone charger method to steal her car and damaged the steering column.</p> <p>“The tow truck driver was trying to use a screw driver to start my car and couldn’t get it started,” she said. A passerby found it abandoned shortly after KIRO 7 interviewed her on Thursday. She’s insured but there’s a huge backup on car repairs.</p> <p>“The parts are on back order. I won’t even get into a shop until March,” she said. Meanwhile, she said she had to buy a bike to get around.</p> <p>Renton police are once again urging people to get steering wheel locks on their cars, saying that cars parked at apartment complexes are being hit particularly hard.</p> <p>It’s a similar situation in Auburn, with the 120 cars stolen so far in January.</p>

Auburn resident Nathan Jackson says someone's been coming to his neighborhood to steal mail, so he put up some surveillance cameras.

Thursday night, he noticed the same car back in the neighborhood and decided to confront the man.

"He's jiggling on those (car) handles, and that's when I say, 'Hey, what are you doing?'" Jackson said.

At one point things got tense.

"He kind of comes at me - see how he is like almost going to assault me," Jackson said, pointing at the video. "I backed up against the car and held my hand behind my back, and said, 'I have something bigger than you, bud,'" he said.

Jackson says the man ran off and left neighborhood. Auburn police responded and confirmed the car was stolen.

But, Jackson learned police wouldn't have been able to pursue the suspect. The law now only allows officers to chase when they have probable cause of a violent crime, or sex crime.

"It made me sad. It made me sad for every one of us," Jackson said.

Now Jackson says the neighborhood is taking the role of safety into their own hands, starting a neighborhood watch to look out for suspects.

"They're going to feel like kings of the world and be able to do whatever they want. I just want to say, not in this neighborhood, because we're all watching out," Jackson said.

KIRO 7 also reached out to the Pierce County Sheriff's Department and got a similar message. Sgt. Darren Moss said they're also dealing with a spike in car thefts, but a bigger concern was that when deputies try to pull over someone with no plates, or a stolen vehicle, the suspects just drive off.

Moss said Thursday night alone, there were five cases of suspects taking off from deputies.

The changes in pursuit law were put into effect in 2021 and are currently being assessed by lawmakers.

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HEADLINE	01/27 Leaked El Salvador data confirm abuses
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/crime-organized-el-salvador-human-rights-watch-prisons-22295b0516db761d30dd278d7df28ba0
GIST	<p>SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — Human Rights Watch says it has obtained a database leaked from El Salvador's government that corroborates massive due process violations, severe prison overcrowding and deaths in custody under the emergency powers put in place last March to confront a surge in gang violence.</p> <p>The global human rights organization said Friday that the database from the Ministry of Public Safety lists details about some 50,000 people arrested between the implementation of the state of exception in late March through late August.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the president said they had not seen the report early Friday and had no comment.</p> <p>El Salvador's Legislative Assembly approved the suspension of some fundamental rights following an outburst of violence from the country's powerful street gangs. People no longer have to be told why they are being arrested or what rights they have or given access to a lawyer. The government also suspended the right of association.</p>

Many of the abuses have been previously reported by Human Rights Watch and local civil society organization Cristosal, but the government data added some detail. It included the names of those arrested, their ages and gender, the charges they face, the prisons they were sent to and where they were arrested.

For example, among those arrested during the period were more than 1,000 minors who were sent to pre-trial detention. In March, the country's Legislative Assembly lowered the age of criminal responsibility to 12 from 16 for gang-related crimes.

The database also pointed to staggering levels of overcrowding in El Salvador's prisons. The government is building a massive new facility, but in the meantime, more and more detainees are stuffed into existing prisons while awaiting trial.

As of August, the prison population had grown to more than 86,000, while according to government information in February 2021, they had a capacity of 30,000.

The government reported in November that 90 people had died in custody since March.

The most common charge those arrested face is "unlawful association," accounting for some 39,000 of the new cases. More than 8,000 face a charge of belonging to a terrorist organization.

"The use of these broadly defined crimes opens the door to arbitrary arrests of people with no relevant connection to gangs, and does little to ensure justice for violent gang abuses, such as killings and rape," Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

Security Minister Gustavo Villatoro recently said that no international organization was going to tell El Salvador how to fix its problems and that the number of detentions shows that the strategy has been successful.

Violent crime has fallen dramatically across El Salvador and the public has expressed broad support for the harsh measures in polling.

For years, gangs controlled swaths of the country. They commonly controlled who came and went from neighborhoods, including whether government services had access. The gangs also mercilessly extorted local businesses and aggressively recruited for their ranks.

The government reported 495 homicides in 2022, the lowest figure in decades. The government did not include at least 120 killings committed by security forces against alleged gang members. Still, that total pales in comparison to the 6,656 homicides the country endured in 2015.

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HEADLINE	01/29 Repair bill sparked Half Moon Bay shooting
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-california-san-francisco-adbec15fb250d1f589e353ec0eb8aa35
GIST	<p>SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A farmworker charged with killing seven people at two Half Moon Bay mushroom farms reportedly told investigators he was spurred to carry out the shootings after his supervisor demanded he pay \$100 to repair a forklift damaged at work.</p> <p>San Mateo County District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe confirmed to the Bay Area News Group Friday that Chunli Zhao was enraged by the equipment bill, saying that a co-worker was to blame for the collision between his forklift and the co-worker's bulldozer.</p> <p>KNTV-TV, the NBC affiliate in the San Francisco Bay Area, was first to report the development.</p> <p>Authorities say Zhao, 66, shot and killed four workers and wounded a fifth employee Monday at California Terra Garden. He then went to nearby Concord Farms, where he had worked previously, and fatally shot three former co-workers.</p>

	<p>Zhao told KNTV-TV in a courthouse interview Thursday that he committed the shootings. He said he was bullied and worked long hours on the farms and his complaints were ignored, the station reported.</p> <p>On Monday, Zhao vented to his supervisor about the bill, but the supervisor insisted he needed to pay. Zhao then allegedly shot the supervisor and the co-worker, the news outlets reported.</p> <p>Speaking in Mandarin, Zhao told the television station from a county jail in Redwood City that he has been in the U.S. for 11 years and has a green card. He said he has a 40-year-old daughter in China and lived with his wife in Half Moon Bay.</p> <p>The coroner's office has named six of the victims: Zhishen Liu, 73, of San Francisco; Marciano Martinez Jimenez, 50, of Moss Beach, California; Aixiang Zhang, 74, of San Francisco; Qizhong Cheng, 66, of Half Moon Bay; Jingzhi Lu, 64, of Half Moon Bay; and Yetao Bing, 43, whose hometown was unknown.</p> <p>The charging documents identified Jose Romero Perez as the other person killed and Pedro Romero Perez as the eighth victim, who survived.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Pierce Co. armed robberies up 71%
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/armed-robberies-pierce-county-rise/281-af1205eb-e53f-4f24-bd0f-407871aa1383?ref=exit-recirc
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Lake Tapps Deli on Forest Canyon Road was the site of an armed robbery in Pierce County on Sunday.</p> <p>Michele Haney has been working at the deli for just three months, and was shocked to hear about what happened to her colleague.</p> <p>"I don't know what I would do in the same situation, and she's a very calm, stoic person...I just don't know what I would do," Haney said.</p> <p>Surveillance video from the incident showed two male suspects walk into the store and immediately pull out a gun and point it at the clerk. They demanded money and threatened to shoot her.</p> <p>As the clerk passed the cash to him, the second suspect walked behind the counter. Investigators from the Pierce County Sheriff's Department (PCSD) said they were trying to open the safe.</p> <p>After a while, the two suspects ran out of the store with the store's cash, keys to the store and the clerk's purse.</p> <p>Sgt. Darren Moss with the Pierce County Sheriff's Department says armed robberies were up 71% last year compared to the last five year average.</p> <p>"To wrap your mind around it, 5% is a big increase. We're at 71% increase for armed robberies, which are very, very violent crimes," Moss said.</p> <p>And Moss says the perpetrators of these kinds of violent crimes are getting younger.</p> <p>"They are robbing people at gunpoint, they're shooting at each other, they're involved in homicides, they're victims of homicides, they're stealing cars, they're getting into police pursuits," Moss said. "It's really troubling if we're having young people committing all these crimes."</p> <p>Haney says the deli is taking steps to upgrade its security, such as installing more cameras, changing the locks and getting a security guard to patrol the area.</p> <p>She said there's also a deeper issue at play that can't be so easily fixed.</p>

	"People are becoming benign to it, and it's another day in America and seriously, I feel like crying," she said, holding back tears. "Life is not precious anymore, people don't care."
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HEADLINE	01/28 Capitol rioter using mace gets 80mo. jail
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2023/01/28/Jan-6-rioter-maced-Capitol-Officer-Sicknick-draws-80-month-sentence/2061674909531/
GIST	<p>Jan. 28 (UPI) -- Jan. 6 rioter Julian Khater, who sprayed the late Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick and others in the face with mace during the insurrection, has drawn an 80-month jail sentence.</p> <p>U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Hogan issued the sentence -- along with a fine of \$10,000 fine and \$2,000 in restitution -- Friday in Washington D.C., dismissing Khater's claim that his issues with "crippling anxiety" rendered him less than fully responsible for his actions.</p> <p>Prosecutors had requested a jail sentence of 90 months.</p> <p>Khater was convicted in September after pleading guilty to ten counts, including assaulting, resisting, or impeding certain officers using a dangerous weapon in connection with the Jan. 6 assault on the Capitol by a mob of supporters of former President Donald Trump.</p> <p>The government alleged that Khater's "first victim" during the riot was Sicknick, who died of multiple strokes hours after the attack. Sicknick, who was guarding the police barricade on the Lower West Terrace of the Capitol, was sprayed in the face by Khater at a close distance of approximately 5 to 10 feet, they said.</p> <p>After recovering his eyesight from the attack, the police line had broken down on the Lower West Terrace and rioters entered the Capitol. He later responded to a call of shots fired on the floor of the House of Representatives.</p> <p>Sicknick remained on duty at the Capitol until he began slurring his speech and eventually lost consciousness. He was transported to George Washington University Hospital where he remained on life support for nearly 24 hours. He was pronounced dead at 8:51 p.m. on Jan. 7, 2021.</p> <p>Khater's co-defendant, George Tanios, drew a five-month sentence from Hogan on Friday after pleading guilty to purchasing and carrying the toxic spray used by Khater in the attack.</p> <p>While Sicknick's death was ruled to have been from natural causes, family members said in victim impact statements it became clear to them he died as a result of the Jan. 6 insurrection.</p> <p>His mother, Gladys Sicknick, told Khater, "You are at center stage in our recurring nightmare.</p> <p>"You, among all the other crazies -- you are the reason Brian is dead, Mr. Khater," she wrote.</p> <p>The rioters who breached the Capitol that day, she wrote, "whether or not they've been charged with crimes... all of you are culpable in Brian's death. All of you bear responsibility for the injuries sustained by Brian's fellow officers -- the broken bones, head trauma, and the continuing mental anguish they suffer -- and will endure -- for the rest of their lives."</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Baltimore mass shooting: 1 dead, 4 injured
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/1-dead-4-injured-baltimore-shooting-crash-police/story?id=96744692
GIST	One person was killed and four others were injured following a mass shooting Saturday in Baltimore after a passenger was shot and crashed their car, police said.

	<p>The incident took place around 6:39 p.m. when a woman was driving in her car and crashed after being shot, police said. Central District officers responded to the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and Laurens Street in reference to a Shot Spotter alert, according to the Baltimore Police Department.</p> <p>The police arrived at the scene to find two adult males, an adult female, and a 2-year-old boy, all of whom were suffering from apparent gun shot wounds.</p> <p>Medics transported the victims to area hospitals, where one of the adult male victims was pronounced dead. The adult female and the other adult male are listed in critical condition. The 2-year-old is listed in stable condition.</p> <p>An additional victim, a 6-year-old boy, was injured in a car accident following the shooting, police said.</p> <p>The Baltimore Police Department released a statement and said they were aware of the incident.</p> <p>"Commissioner Harrison and PIO are on scene of a shooting with multiple victims near the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and Laurens Street. Media staging area will be at the intersection of Laurens Street and Brunt Street," the department tweeted.</p> <p>One man was detained by the police on Saturday.</p> <p>"We are working to ascertain whether or not he is a victim or has some involvement if any. And we're not saying one way or the other, but we—detectives are working on that as we speak," Baltimore Police Commissioner Michael Harrison said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Out of custody: suspect substation attack
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-accused-in-pierce-county-substation-attacks-released-from-custody/
GIST	<p>TACOMA — One of the two men charged with vandalizing electrical substations in Pierce County over the holidays to cover a burglary was ordered released from federal custody Friday to seek substance abuse help.</p> <p>A federal judge issued the order for Matthew Greenwood, 32, after renewed efforts by his attorney to get Greenwood into a drug-treatment facility, The News Tribune reported.</p> <p>Greenwood and Jeremy Crahan, 40, both of Puyallup, have been charged with conspiracy to damage energy facilities. According to the complaint, Greenwood told investigators after his arrest that the two knocked out power so they could burglarize a business and steal from the cash register.</p> <p>The attacks on Dec. 25 caused at least \$3 million in damage and left about 30,000 people without power, according to court documents and utility officials.</p> <p>Greenwood was also charged with possession of a short-barreled rifle and short-barreled shotgun.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Robert J. Bryan granted Greenwood's release on an appearance bond, or the promise to show up to future hearings and abide by conditions, including electronic monitoring and mandated drug treatment.</p> <p>Bryan noted the court was taking a risk, telling Greenwood: "It's up to you to be sure that the risk is well-taken."</p> <p>Assistant U.S. Attorney Todd Greenberg opposed Greenwood's release, noting Greenwood's alleged disregard for community safety.</p>

	<p>“Is this someone the court can trust to be safe in this community?” Greenberg said. “I think the answer to that is ‘no.’”</p> <p>Greenwood’s attorney, assistant federal public defender Rebecca Fish, said he was neither a flight risk nor a threat. He has lived locally his entire life and was expecting his first child.</p> <p>Besides electronic monitoring, Fish said Greenwood was on a waitlist for sober and supportive housing, which he would enter into after treatment.</p> <p>Conspiracy to attack energy facilities is punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Possession of an unregistered firearm is punishable by up to 10 years.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/28 Calif. mass shooting: 3 killed, 4 wounded
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/28/us/los-angeles-fatal-shooting/index.html
GIST	<p>Three people were killed and at least four injured in a shooting in Los Angeles, the city’s fire department said Saturday, California’s fourth mass shooting this month.</p> <p>The Los Angeles Fire Department responded to a call for help at 2:35 a.m. on a residential street northwest of downtown, a spokesperson said.</p> <p>Responders found three people dead and two injured, which were taken to a hospital, the fire department said. Two others took themselves to a hospital, the spokesperson said.</p> <p>CNN affiliate KCAL said the shooting occurred just outside of Beverly Hills in the Beverly Crest community. Three victims were shot inside a car and other four while standing outside a home.</p> <p>Police said the first call came in about an “assault with a deadly weapon,” the station reported.</p> <p>The four people hospitalized are reportedly in critical condition, the station said.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 DEA hampers itself drug trafficking fight
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/27/fentanyl-mexico-dea/
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY — As illegal fentanyl was surging across the U.S. southwestern border, the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Mexico office was in turmoil for more than six months with a director recalled to Washington while investigators probed his conduct, according to current and former U.S. officials.</p> <p>The investigation, which has not been previously reported, came at a critical time. Cooperation between the DEA and Mexican authorities had deteriorated under the nationalist government of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Drug overdose deaths in the United States, meanwhile, were soaring to record levels, as Mexico consolidated its role as the No. 1 source of fentanyl in the United States.</p> <p>The move left the DEA regional office in Mexico City, which oversees the agency’s operations in Mexico and Central America, without a full-time resident director for at least six months beginning in June 2021 — just as the Biden administration was starting to confront the crisis.</p> <p>The upheaval in one of the DEA’s most important offices was an embarrassing distraction as agents tried to work with Mexico’s corruption-ridden security agencies to deter drug trafficking, according to several U.S. officials who worked in the country in recent years.</p> <p>“You can’t fix what’s going wrong in the Mexican government if your own house is on fire,” said one ex-DEA agent. Like other current and former U.S. officials, he spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive personnel matter.</p>

This week the Justice Department's internal watchdog said it had found that a DEA regional director misused agency funds for his birthday party and for "unallowable items" during trips by the agency's top official. The director was ultimately "removed from DEA" based on a second investigation, the Office of the Inspector General said in a summary, but it provided no details.

The office didn't identify the official. The DEA's former Mexico regional director, Nick Palmeri, confirmed to The Washington Post that the statement referred to him. He blasted the release, which he said "erroneously states that I was removed from the DEA." His departure, he wrote in a WhatsApp message, "should be considered as a forced retirement."

He said the investigation into his spending "was used as part of an ill-conceived narrative to remove me from my position" due to an internal feud at the agency.

The agency, asked about the case, said: "The DEA holds its 10,000 employees to the highest standards of conduct and professionalism. When an employee is found to have not lived up to those standards, DEA takes decisive action, including removal from the agency."

The episode is the latest black eye for an agency that's been buffeted by corruption scandals, including the jailing of a Miami-based DEA agent who pleaded guilty in 2020 to diverting more than \$9 million from undercover operations to fund pricey sports cars, luxury travel and parties.

Palmeri, a onetime New York City police officer who had worked at the DEA office in Guadalajara, Mexico, and later held a senior role in the agency's New York office, was known as a talented investigator. He started as regional director in Mexico City in early 2020.

It was a particularly challenging moment. López Obrador had reduced cooperation with the DEA, citing Mexico's sovereignty and a shift in policy from focusing on capturing drug kingpins to running social programs for youth and the poor.

Then the coronavirus pandemic struck.

The virus swept through DEA's office in the Pacific coast city of Mazatlán, Mexico, after agency employees held meetings in violation of embassy health protocols, according to four current and former U.S. officials. Two DEA agents became so ill they were medivacked to the United States, they said.

Things only got worse for the DEA. In October 2020, U.S. authorities arrested former Mexican defense minister Salvador Cienfuegos in Los Angeles on drug-trafficking allegations. That provoked such outrage in Mexico that the Trump administration dropped the charges and sent the general home. López Obrador, unmollified, signed a law sharply limiting the DEA's activities in the country, and his administration held up visas for about 20 American agents for months.

Amid the turbulence, officials at DEA headquarters began receiving reports of alleged mismanagement in the Mexico office. In June 2021, Palmeri was ordered back to Washington as investigators probed the allegations.

In the report summary released Wednesday, the inspector general's office said the regional director had used DEA funds intended for professional gatherings for an inappropriate activity: his own birthday party. The director also approved payment for "unallowable items" during trips by the DEA's top official, the office said, dipping into funds that were supposed to be used for sensitive drug investigations. It did not describe the items.

Among the incidents that investigators scrutinized was a party on a yacht organized for then-DEA acting administrator Timothy Shea during a visit to Panama, according to current and former DEA agents. It was not clear whether the investigators found any wrongdoing; Shea, a Trump appointee, declined to comment. Palmeri said that renting the yacht was "100% justified and professional" and that "the results and

relationships cultivated” on his watch with “minimal expenditures” were worth it. Another former DEA agent said the yacht was rented because restaurants in Panama were off-limits during the pandemic.

The inspector general’s office decided not to seek criminal prosecution, it said in its statement. But the DEA had opened a second investigation into several other questions, including whether Palmeri had improper relationships with defense attorneys for drug traffickers, according to current and former U.S. officials knowledgeable about the probe.

That’s a sensitive subject for the DEA: Last May, federal prosecutors charged a retired agency supervisor in Miami and an active-duty agent with taking part in an alleged scheme to pass law enforcement information to defense attorneys representing traffickers.

The DEA declined to provide any details on that second probe. But The Associated Press, citing internal agency documents, said one focus was a two-day visit by Palmeri and his wife in early 2021 to a home in the Florida Keys owned by David Macey, a prominent defense attorney. The trip violated agency rules aimed at avoiding the appearance of impropriety, the AP said. Palmeri, in a message to The Post, acknowledged making the visit but said he hadn’t been involved in a case linked to Macey in years. The AP said Palmeri also met privately with a confidential source during that trip. “There was no contemporaneous official DEA documentation” on the debriefing, a violation of DEA policy, investigators wrote, according to the AP. A former DEA official with knowledge of the investigation confirmed to The Post that the meetings were central to the probe.

Palmeri said he never engaged in any unethical behavior. “I strongly deny improper contact with defense attorneys,” he told The Post. He blamed the investigation on a “personal vendetta” by another DEA official, whom he declined to identify. He said the probe had concluded with a recommendation that “I be terminated.”

As for the inspector general’s report, he said, items were “taken out of context.” His expenditures on activities with Mexican officials “were professional” and benefited the U.S. government, he said, and any minor procedural violations were “most often resolved with corrective actions.” Palmeri left the agency in March 2022.

One of Palmeri’s former colleagues said he was an outstanding investigator but had the freewheeling, bigger-than-life style of many DEA agents who’d built their careers in New York. “They were programmed differently,” with major roles in some of the country’s biggest drug cases, assembled by highly aggressive prosecutors, the ex-official said. “It was OK to stay on the edge.”

While Palmeri was out of Mexico and under investigation, officials said, the DEA periodically sent a respected senior official, Paul Knierim, to fill in. A permanent replacement was named in November 2021. But that new director, Todd Zimmerman, didn’t move to the country full time until mid-2022, according to a State Department official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters.

While Palmeri was being investigated, U.S. law enforcement was facing a mounting fentanyl crisis. More than 107,000 Americans died of drug overdoses in 2021, the latest data available. Two-thirds of those were caused by fentanyl. The synthetic opioid has become the leading cause of death for Americans ages 18 to 49, according to a Post analysis of death data for 2021 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The flow of the cheap drug across the U.S. border shows no sign of diminishing. The DEA seized more than 50 million illegal fentanyl tablets last year — twice the number in 2021 — and over 10,000 pounds of fentanyl powder. Mexico’s two biggest drug cartels, which traffic most of the U.S. fentanyl, are the “DEA’s top operational priority,” the agency’s administrator, Anne Milgram, said in December.

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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/white-supremacists-sent-to-prison-for-brutal-assault-on-black-dj-at-wa-bar/
GIST	<p>Four avowed white supremacists were sentenced to federal prison Friday after pleading guilty to hate crimes and lying to the FBI about brutally beating a Black DJ unconscious at a Lynnwood tavern in 2018.</p> <p>The attack took place just hours after the four men attended a ceremony marking the death of the murderous neo-Nazi activist Robert Jay Mathews, founder of The Order, who was killed in an FBI shootout at Smuggler's Cove on Whidbey Island in 1984.</p> <p>U.S. District Judge Richard Jones told each of the men in turn that their actions were reprehensible and that they were heroes to nobody's cause.</p> <p>"The man you revered is no martyr," Jones told one of the defendants, Jason Stanley, a 46-year-old skinhead and felon from Boise, Idaho. "He was a manager of hate."</p> <p>"You have a right to hold your feelings and thoughts," Jones said. "Nowhere does that protection extend to beating someone."</p> <p>Stanley, who is heavily tattooed with white supremacist slogans and pictures, including the likeness of Adolf Hitler, was sentenced to federal prison for 48 months, even though the defense and prosecution had agreed to recommend a 37-month sentence. Another of the men, Jason DeSimas, 45, also was given a four-year prison sentence.</p> <p>A third defendant, 42-year-old Randy Smith, received a 42-month sentence, and the fourth man, Daniel Dorson, 27, was given 28 months.</p> <p>The men, indicted in 2020 after an extensive FBI investigation, were also ordered to serve three years apiece of supervised release and pay \$170,969.48 total in restitution of Smith's medical expenses and lost wages.</p> <p>Jones told Stanley that he and his colleagues were nothing more than "modern-day, unhooded [Ku Klux Klan]."</p> <p>The four men were among a group of neo-Nazi skinheads who took over the dance floor at Lynnwood's Rec Room Bar & Grill the night of Dec. 8, 2018, after attending a so-called "Martyr's Day" memorial at the site where Mathews died on adjacent Whidbey Island.</p> <p>The men were wearing clothing that marked them as white supremacists, according to court documents, and used racial slurs and Nazi salutes — taunting and confronting the DJ, Tyrone Smith. When he reacted, they kicked, punched and stomped him to the ground, the documents said.</p> <p>Smith took a break, came back and found Stanley attempting to operate his turntables. He attempted to move Stanley aside, and the four men jumped him — later claiming it was a case of "mutual combat" because Smith had pushed Stanley.</p> <p>Smith, now 41, addressed the court during DeSimas' sentencing, testifying that his life has never been the same. He suffered a serious head injury that resulted in him losing his house and a job at Boeing with a six-figure paycheck. He also suffers from severe PTSD, walks with a cane and takes a dozen pills a day to control seizures and muscle weakness, he said.</p> <p>"My life was changed forever," he said. "They took away my former life and livelihood. I am afraid. I never know when the Hammerskins might come for me. I have to deal with depression, fear, anxiety and pain."</p> <p>Stanley, according to court documents, was a pledge for the white supremacist group "Hammerskins 38" at the time of the assault.</p>

	<p>Two men who attempted to intervene also suffered injuries from being punched and struck in the face, court records say.</p> <p>U.S. Attorney Nicholas Brown said during a Friday news conference that the government needs to “treat hate crime as the virus that it is.” He said prosecuting crimes rooted in racial or religious discrimination is a priority for his office and the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, which led the prosecution of the four men.</p> <p>Brown was flanked by Vanessa Waldref, the U.S. Attorney from the Eastern District of Washington in Spokane, which has traditionally been a hotbed of the neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements in the state. Also speaking was Richard Collodi, the special agent in charge of the FBI in Washington, who said investigating hate crimes is a priority of his agents.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 US: 3 in Iran-backed plot to kill journalist
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/27/iran-backed-assassination-attempt-journalist-charges
GIST	<p>US prosecutors have charged three members of an eastern European criminal organization with ties to Iran’s government with conspiring to assassinate a journalist and activist who is an American citizen, the attorney general, Merrick Garland, said on Friday.</p> <p>Rafat Amirov, Polad Omarov and Khalid Mehdiyev were charged with murder-for-hire and money laundering for their role in the thwarted Tehran-backed plot, the Department of Justice said in a statement.</p> <p>“The victim publicized [the] Iranian government’s human rights abuses, discriminatory treatment of women, suppression of democratic participation and expression and use of arbitrary imprisonment, torture and execution,” Garland said.</p> <p>“This activity posed such a threat to the government of Iran that the chief judge of Iran’s revolutionary courts warned that anyone who sent videos to the victim criticizing the regime would be sentenced to prison.”</p> <p>Garland did not name the alleged victim, but Mehdiyev was arrested last year in New York for having a rifle outside the Brooklyn home of journalist Masih Alinejad, a longtime critic of Iran’s head-covering laws who has promoted videos of women violating those laws on social media.</p> <p>Alinejad told Reuters she was invited to the FBI headquarters in Manhattan on Friday morning where a dozen agents described to her the details of the alleged plot.</p> <p>In July, the men had planned to get Alinejad out of her house by asking her for flowers from her garden, and then gun her down, authorities said.</p> <p>Her elaborate garden is well known in the neighborhood: each section is dedicated to family in Iran from whom she has been separated for 13 years. The assailants had been monitoring the property and may have observed that she often shares flowers with her neighbors, she said.</p> <p>But she spotted the assailants surveilling her house and fled, authorities said. “Imagine they had opened fire,” she said. “How many of my beautiful neighbors would have died. My stepchildren?”</p> <p>Alinejad said the assassination attempt shows that Iran is terrified of Iranian women demanding their rights, which she often promotes through social media. “They are scared of their own people,” she said. “Like millions of others I want freedom for my country. I don’t deserve to die for that.”</p> <p>Mehdiyev pleaded not guilty to one count of possessing a firearm with an obliterated serial number. He is being held at Brooklyn’s metropolitan detention center pending trial.</p>

	<p>Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>US prosecutors in 2021 charged four Iranians alleged to be intelligence operatives for Tehran with plotting to kidnap a New York-based journalist and activist. While the target of the plot was not named, Reuters confirmed she was Alinejad.</p> <p>Amirov was arrested on Thursday and will have a pre-trial hearing in federal court in Manhattan later on Friday. Omarov was arrested in the Czech Republic earlier this month, and the United States is seeking his extradition.</p> <p>The United States in 2011 arrested one man it said was linked to an Iranian plot to assassinate the then Saudi Arabian ambassador to Washington at a restaurant he frequented in the capital.</p> <p>Washington accuses Tehran of backing terrorism and pursuing nuclear arms, charges Iran denies.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/27 Indictments: double life of FBI spy hunter
SOURCE	https://www.businessinsider.com/charles-mcgonigal-fbi-indictment-allison-guerriero-russia-deripaska-spies-nypd-giuliani-2023-1
GIST	<p>One morning in October 2017, Allison Guerriero noticed something unusual on the floor of her boyfriend's Park Slope, Brooklyn, apartment: a bag full of cash. There it was, lying next to his shoes, near the futon, the kind of bag that liquor stores give out. Inside were bundles of bills, big denominations bound up with rubber bands. It didn't seem like something he should be carrying around. After all, her boyfriend, Charles F. McGonigal, held one of the most senior and sensitive positions in the FBI.</p> <p>"Where the f**k is this from?" she asked.</p> <p>"Oh, you remember that baseball game?" McGonigal replied, according to Guerriero's recollection. "I made a bet and won."</p> <p>McGonigal had two high-school-age children and a wife — or "ex-wife" as he sometimes referred to her — back at home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He would return there once or twice a month. But McGonigal had led Guerriero to believe that he was either divorced or soon would be. She didn't question his story, nor did she question the story about the bag full of cash.</p> <p>A few days before, Guerriero had sat on the couch with McGonigal in the one-room garden sublet to watch McGonigal's Cleveland Indians beat the Yankees. Much later — after Guerriero's cancer diagnosis, their breakup, and McGonigal's retirement from the FBI — McGonigal would be indicted on suspicion of, among other things, accepting \$225,000 in cash from a former employee of Albania's intelligence agency. That total includes one \$80,000 chunk that was allegedly handed over in a parked car, outside a restaurant, on October 5, 2017. October 5 and 6 also happened to be the days when the Indians beat the Yankees in the first two games of the American League Division Series. Today, Guerriero no longer believes the bag of cash contained winnings from a sports bet.</p> <p>One of McGonigal's attorneys, Seth DuCharme, declined to comment.</p> <p>Guerriero was 44 when they met, a former substitute kindergarten teacher who volunteered for law-enforcement causes and was working as a contractor for a security company while living at home with her father. McGonigal, then 49 years old, had just started his new job at the FBI's New York office.</p> <p>Guerriero says their affair lasted for a little more than a year. McGonigal's Brooklyn sublet may have been modest, but he lived large. He courted Guerriero at high-end restaurants. He would give her gifts of cash — \$500 or \$1,000 — for her birthday and for Christmas. He once joked about framing his divorce papers for her, as a Christmas gift, but those papers never materialized. He took her to watch New Jersey Devils hockey games in a private box. She recalls that McGonigal once gave a hundred-dollar bill to a panhandler</p>

on the street. "I'm a little better off than him. I can spare a hundred dollars," Guerriero remembers McGonigal saying, after she expressed astonishment.

That day in October wasn't the only time that Guerriero remembers McGonigal carrying large amounts of cash. After he brushed her curiosity aside, she tempered her suspicions. She told herself it was probably "buy money" for a sting operation, or a payoff for one of McGonigal's informants. She had dated federal law-enforcement officials before. She knew not to ask too many questions about work.

"Charlie McGonigal knew everybody in the national security and law-enforcement world," Guerriero said, in an interview with Insider. "He fooled them all. So why should I feel bad that he was able to deceive me?"

The dual indictments lodged against McGonigal earlier this week in New York and Washington, DC, are the culmination of a grand-jury investigation that Insider [exclusively reported on last year](#), and they lay out breathtaking allegations of subterfuge and corruption. But Guerriero says that McGonigal's deceptions extended beyond his duties as a counterintelligence chief and into their personal life. Two sources who knew both McGonigal and Guerriero in New York told Insider that they believed Guerriero's account of the relationship, including her claim that McGonigal had led Guerriero to believe that he was effectively single. And Guerriero's father told Insider that McGonigal would regularly drive to his house, where Guerriero lived, to pick her up.

"I was deceived about it," Guerriero's father said. "He seemed to be a straight shooter. If I'd had known he was married, I would have said something."

Federal prosecutors charged McGonigal with money laundering and making false statements in his mandatory employee disclosures to the FBI. He was also charged with taking money from a representative of Oleg Deripaska, a Russian oligarch who McGonigal had once himself investigated, in violation of US economic sanctions against Russia; the indictment alleges that Deripaska paid him to investigate a rival oligarch. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

McGonigal was not an ordinary FBI agent. He led the WikiLeaks investigation into Chelsea Manning as well as a search for a Chinese mole inside the CIA. While working at FBI headquarters in Washington, he played a role in opening the investigation into the Trump campaign's Russia contacts that was later dubbed Operation Crossfire Hurricane.

But it was McGonigal's final FBI job, special agent in charge of the counterintelligence division at the FBI's New York field office, that was his most important assignment at the bureau. It was his job to find enemy spies and recruit his own.

"New York City is a global center for espionage and counterespionage," says one senior law-enforcement insider who was closely familiar with the specifics of McGonigal's role. "You have visits from foreign business elites and politicians. You have the United Nations. You have ethnic populations. Who runs the pitches to recruit spies from all those other countries? The FBI. So the access you get in that job is extraordinary. It's almost bottomless. So if you're running FBI counterintelligence in New York, you can get your hands on almost anything you want, and you don't always have to make excuses for why you're asking for it."

The impact of the McGonigal indictments is still rippling out through the law-enforcement world. The charges accuse an official at the heart of the Trump-Russia investigation of secretly selling his own access, accepting bundles of cash in surreptitious meetings with someone who had ties to Albanian intelligence. McGonigal, a top-tier member of the city's law-enforcement community, a man who had fully integrated himself into a powerful circle of trust where favors get swapped and sensitive intelligence gets circulated, is accused of himself being on the take. If the indictments are correct, McGonigal was leading a dangerous double life, right under the noses of some of the sharpest cops in America.

But what might be most striking about the case against McGonigal is how cheaply he is alleged to have rented out his law-enforcement powers. One indictment suggests that for \$225,000, McGonigal's

associates got him to lobby the Albanian prime minister about the awarding of oil-field drilling licenses and then open an FBI investigation connected to a US citizen who had lobbied for one of the prime minister's political opponents. Arranging a meeting for an executive from a Bosnian pharmaceutical company with a US official at the United Nations was said to be a pricier item — \$500,000, one indictment claims. It is unclear whether that money ever materialized.

In September 2018, McGonigal left the FBI to work as a vice president at Brookfield Properties, a multibillion-dollar real-estate company. His salary there was most likely higher than what he made inside the government, but it wasn't anywhere near the C-suite or oligarch-scale money that courses through New York's penthouse condos and boardrooms. One law-enforcement source estimated that McGonigal stood to make roughly \$300,000 to \$350,000 a year, including annual bonuses. "He said he needed to make more money," said Guerriero, who was still in the relationship with McGonigal when he left the FBI. "He had two kids to put through college."

The value that McGonigal is accused of providing — his access and his pull — are clear from the indictments. One of them alleges that he arranged for the daughter of a foreign contact, a college student, to get a VIP tour from the New York City Police Department. The indictment identifies that foreign contact as "Agent-1," an agent of the Russian oligarch Deripaska, former Russian diplomat, and rumored Russian intelligence officer. That description matches Evgeny Fokin, who works for En+, a Deripaska-owned energy company, and was already linked to McGonigal and an associate in a Foreign Agents Registration Act filing from November 2021.

Agent-1's identity remains unconfirmed. Neither Fokin nor En+ responded to requests for comment. A person familiar with the NYPD's arrangement said the daughter was a guest, not an intern. She didn't have independent access to police facilities, they said, and was given no work to do.

Guerriero recalls McGonigal using the FBI's resources for their relationship. Once, they had sex in an SUV that she understood to be federal government property. After she was found to have breast cancer, Guerriero recalls, McGonigal would occasionally send a junior agent in an FBI sedan to give her rides from New Jersey to her cousin's apartment in New York. Despite the ongoing deception about his marital status, McGonigal was "caring, loving, and concerned" during the period of her illness, she says.

In late 2018, McGonigal and Guerriero broke up. She remembers receiving an anonymous and hostile note in the mail. Soon after, McGonigal told her he was still married and had no plans to divorce his wife. "I was shocked," she said. "I was very much in love with him, and I was so hurt." She started drinking heavily to cope. A few months later, Guerriero, after a bout of drinking, dashed off an angry email to William Sweeney, who was in charge of the FBI's New York City bureau, and who, she recalls, had first introduced her to McGonigal. She remembers telling Sweeney in the email that he should look into their extramarital affair, and also McGonigal's dealings in Albania. McGonigal had already befriended Albania's prime minister and traveled to the country extensively, dealings that would appear later in one of his indictments. Guerriero told Insider that she had deleted the email.

Sweeney didn't reply to a request for comment made through Sweeney's current employer, Citigroup. Insider couldn't confirm that Guerriero had sent the email or that Sweeney had received it. Regardless, by November 2021, the FBI was looking into McGonigal. Two agents showed up at Guerriero's door, she says, showed her a picture of McGonigal with the Albanian prime minister, and interviewed her about their interactions. She also received a [grand-jury subpoena](#) requesting all of her communications with McGonigal as well as information about any "payments or gifts" he may have given her.

Guerriero acknowledges that the combination of her alcohol abuse and her health problems led to some extreme behavior, including her sending hostile emails to McGonigal's family, the contents of which she says she cannot recall. "I really did go overboard," she said. "I harassed them. I'm not going to deny that. I was horrible to them."

By her own account, Guerriero contacted one of McGonigal's children despite being prohibited from doing so by a court order, an incident that led to her spending the night in a New Jersey jail. The court order

stemmed from a 2019 police report, obtained by Insider, that McGonigal's wife, Pamela, filed with the Montgomery County Police Department in Maryland. The report states that McGonigal and Guerriero "had a relationship" and that Guerriero had repeatedly harassed her with unwelcome emails and phone calls — including 20 calls in one day — despite her asking Guerriero to stop.

Guerriero confirmed that her contact with the McGonigal family led to a separate restraining order issued in New Jersey. "I am ashamed and embarrassed and sorry for my actions during the time that I was drinking," she said.

Guerriero's troubles worsened in early 2021, when she was badly burned during a fire at her father's house. She asked friends for help through a GoFundMe. Former Mayor Rudy Giuliani of New York City, whom she knew from law-enforcement circles, let her stay in a guest bedroom. Since then, Guerriero has been a frequent on-air caller for Giuliani's radio shows. She maintains that the 2020 election was marred by widespread voter fraud, a belief pushed by Giuliani that has been repeatedly debunked. "Whatever Giuliani says about the 2020 election is what I believe," she said. During her relationship with McGonigal, Guerriero says, they never talked about politics. "I thought he was apolitical," he said, "which is something I continue to believe."

The FBI declined to address the specifics of Guerriero's story. Instead, it sent a statement from Director Christopher Wray, who said the FBI holds employees to "the highest standard" and treats everyone equally, "even when it is one of our own." Insider spoke with three of McGonigal's former law-enforcement colleagues who expressed shock about the indictments. "It's heartbreaking," said one, who had worked alongside McGonigal at the FBI. "This is an incredible organization filled with truly dedicated men and women. This sets our image and reputation back."

Guerriero's father said his view of the FBI had already been tarnished by the way that McGonigal treated his daughter. "I've always had huge admiration for the FBI," he said. "I idealized the agents that I saw in the movies. I thought these people were gods, that they never did anything wrong. It was so disappointing." He did say, however, that McGonigal had called him after the relationship ended to apologize for his behavior, and that he had accepted McGonigal's apology.

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